

# Acknowledgements

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## Section One - Executive Summary

With the assistance of the 'Strategies with Kids, Information for Parents' (SKIP), RMS Refugee Resettlement Wellington is assessing the needs of refugee parents, and how parenting support can be made more accessible for these diverse communities.

The project's overarching aim is the establishment of culturally appropriate and effective parenting support for refugees resettling in New Zealand. This initial step is to provide a scoping study of how the SKIP concept can be best transferred and adapted to meet the needs of refugee communities in the Wellington region.

SKIP's message is an important one; however it will require careful targeting if it is to be effective in refugee communities. With this in mind this scoping study will:

- Identify specific parenting needs for refugees in the Wellington region
- Identify particular considerations and best practice in responding to those needs
- Identifying possible areas for action in responding to those needs

These concerns have been identified through the compilation of a literature review, and in-depth qualitative interviews with service providers in NGO's, government and health settings. Finally the study conducted in-depth qualitative interviews and one focus group with community representatives from the Ethiopian, Assyrian, Iraqi, Sudanese and Somali communities in Wellington.

The 1951 United Nations Convention defines a refugee as a person whom;

*"...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."*  
(United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2005a).

The New Zealand Immigration service accepts an annual quota of refugees. At present the size of this quota is set at 750. As well as quota refugees Aotearoa accepts people under the family reunification category in general family reunification immigration policy, and through successful claims for asylum. (NZIS, 2001).

Each of these different categories for gaining permanent residence entails a different level of resettlement support, and a distinct experience of resettlement.

Many of the resettlement challenges refugees face relate to changes in family structure, roles, and altered informal social support networks. For parents there is concern as their children are exposed to very different cultural norms than in their own childhood. These challenges are compounded by educational, communication and language barriers, trauma and grief, cultural differences, inter-generational dislocation, single parent families, a lack of support for women and children, and poverty issues.

In Aotearoa New Zealand refugee parents are a particularly disempowered group that critically need help to develop their parenting skills in a new cultural context and discover alternatives for positive parenting.

Concurrently, there is growing debate and public concern about the prevalence of physical discipline in New Zealand homes. One of the government and civil sector responses has been to ensure that all parents, regardless of ethnicity, economic status, and geographical location have access to positive parenting information, education and support.

The SKIP program looks to use 6 principles to give parents the tools to care for their children without the use of physical discipline. These principles are:

- Parental Warmth and Involvement
- Clear Communication and Expectations
- Induction and Explanation
- Rules, Boundaries and Demands
- Consistency and Consequences

- Context – Structuring the Situation (Children’s Issues Centre, 2004).

These principles need to be applied in a culturally appropriate manner to be effective for refugee, and ethnic minority communities. Terreni (2002) warns that we have to be careful to unpack the pedagogy of the parenting and early childhood education we wish to communicate. In making decisions about cultural appropriateness it is important that communities have the opportunity to make decisions about the type of values and information they are interested in receiving (Bihi, 1999; Ibrahim, 2004).

This parenting support can be delivered in many different ways, including centre-based, seminars, outreach programmes, playgroups, multi-levelled support, and linkages with kindergartens and educational institutions. Often it is difficult to compare programmes because their success is closely tied with the needs and make-up of the community they are delivered in (Gray, 2001). There is no one best model of support (Families Commission, 2005).

Predominantly the method of delivering parenting support to refugee communities has involved organised parenting classes for specific cultural groups. These models run by either training members of that community to be parenting facilitators, or by employing interpreters to work alongside a facilitator. There are a number of benefits and challenges for providing support in this format. (Department of Community Relationships and Responsiveness, 2004; Janif, 2005; MCLaSS, 2003; RRS, 2005).

Internationally a mixture of outreach, class based and wraparound services have been established to support refugee parents. Information from refugee communities abroad highlights the importance of parenting support, and the need to build strong relationships between the generations. Services that provide multiple levels of support have been effective, as have services that give parents the chance to discuss cultural adjustment, and build on the strengths that families already possess. (BRYCS, 2005; Cahill, 2005; ReWA, 2005; Sheriff, 1995).

Eleven qualitative interviews with service providers were conducted. Findings were grouped under the following thematic sections; important values when working alongside refugee parents; challenges in working alongside refugee parents; and

opportunities and considerations for providing appropriate parenting support. Key findings included;

**Interviews with Service Providers have shown:**

- Work with refugee parents and families requires time, it is a long process in building trust, understanding, and beginning to help;

*“Time – everything is a long process – nothing is easy, every step brings another problem – it’s a process and it’s tiring for mums. Us working with families works because we are there for the long-haul, it’s about there being a certain time for things, and you have to wait until they are ready”*

- There is a need for greater service provision to support refugee parents and families; this support needs to be long-term, holistic and culturally appropriate;

*“There are not enough places to refer people too, and these services need to be more holistic to cater to the needs of refugee families. At the moment people [service providers] are under too much stress, everybody is just maxed out...there are just not enough appropriate services to deal with the needs”*

- Many families are still struggling with the resettlement process after many years; it is difficult to provide parenting education when there are many other immediate barriers to well-being.
- Work needs to be done in an empowering manner that builds on the strengths of communities. More people from refugee backgrounds need to be trained and employed to providing parenting support for own communities;

*“Your best starting point is to train people up in the communities as parenting educators, that’s your best scenario. It’s about empowering communities to deal with these things.”*

- There is a lack of funding for interpreters, and a lack of culturally appropriate counsellors, social workers and health professionals;

*“I am always looking for ethnically diverse counsellors and social workers but they are just not there”*

- Parents need support in accessing services, and understanding what is available to them;

*“If parents had a child that needed a service, firstly, they didn’t know what the service was, secondly, they didn’t know how to access it, and thirdly, they are not empowered to go and access it anyway.”*

- There is a need to focus on the issues between parents and adolescents

Six interviews with community representatives were conducted, and one focus group with women, the refugee communities included; the Iraqi, Assyrian, Sudanese, Ethiopian and Somali communities. Findings from the interviews highlighted;

**Interviews with Community Leaders and Representatives have shown:**

- It is crucial that parents from refugee backgrounds are able to support their children to maintain their culture and identity;

*“I take my kids to the Mosque every Sunday, to learn Muslim rules, to read and write Arabic and the Koran. Its very important we support them, so they don’t lose their culture and religion”*

- Parents from refugee backgrounds access parenting support through community channels, use community representatives to help them access support, or do not get any assistance for bringing up children;

*“Children are a tribal responsibility... If there is a problem you go to the tribe or spiritual leader, or an elder.”*

- Service providers need to work with communities, to help them identify their own needs, and help them to support themselves.
- Support and information needs to be delivered through community networks.
- There are less social support networks available to refugee parents, as families are scattered due to war and the refugee journey.
- Many parents are unsure about NZ laws, values and practices – they need support to integrate positively by retaining their culture, and building sound relationships with people from other ethnicities;

*“There is lots of discussion around the Western ways in the community. The community needs to know more about the laws around children.”*

- Any parenting support needs to be aware of the gender roles and expectations within communities.
- Parenting practices and values may differ greatly from abroad and in NZ there is a need to focus on the issues between parents and adolescents.

The study has shown that there is a strong need both in refugee communities and with service providers to make resettlement services more culturally appropriate, and that the lack of parenting support available to refugee communities is of concern.

There are many opportunities for creating better parenting support for Wellington's refugee communities, this requires a partnership and community development approach from refugee communities, NGO's and government. The study recommends nine guidelines and considerations for best practice when looking to establish parenting support with refugee communities; these are;

- 1) Working in partnership with refugee communities, so they have ownership of decision-making processes, identification of needs and methods of action, and are employed within the organisation.
- 2) Take a holistic approach to service provision, it is essential that the resettlement needs of families are fully understood and addressed. This means considering and addressing housing, employment, childcare and transport needs of parents.
- 3) Developing a Communication Strategy – this involves identifying key community representatives and members, other refugee resettlement support services, both written and oral information in service users mother tongue, and multiple methods of communicating and building trusting relationships.
- 4) Build on informal support networks, initiatives should not just focus on providing information to refugee parents, but assist them to pull a sense of community, and build friendships and support networks.
- 5) Programme content and delivery need to be linked to the cultural beliefs and values of communities.
- 6) Employ and train staff for cultural and linguistic diversity, ideally employing people from refugee backgrounds.



- 7) Take a multi-levelled approach to the provision of support, this includes both outreach and group or centre based activities.
- 8) Strong administration, and participatory monitoring and evaluation to support the responsiveness and sustainability of the programme/s.
- 9) Ensure that services targeting the parenting of adolescents are also provided.

The study also highlights possible immediate, medium, and long-term opportunities for action for providing parenting support for refugee communities in Wellington.

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## Section Two – Introduction

*“They are the reason why we came. My journey and the pain I have experience will stand for something if my children, and the children of other refugee families, can lead safe and happy lives, and make the most of there potential.”*

Wellington Refugee Community Representative Participant (2005).

All refugees hope to find a safe home, so their children can live in freedom, and have the opportunity of education, employment and their own cultural identity. For refugees resettling in Aotearoa this is no different, their children are their focus, and hopes and dreams for the future. The best way to support these dreams is to ensure that children grow up in homes and communities that are well supported, and are able to access all they need to construct new and successful lives in Aotearoa.

With SKIP’s assistance RMS Refugee Resettlement Wellington is assessing the needs of refugee parents, and how parenting support can be made more accessible for these diverse communities.

Strategies with Kids/Information for Parents (SKIP) is a government initiative to provide positive parenting information for parents and caregivers of children aged 0 to 5 years. Key to this positive parenting scheme is giving parents tools and alternatives to avoid the use of physical discipline with children. These tools will be delivered by supporting communities and community organisations to provide information and education in ways which best meet the parenting needs and values of their own communities.

Reducing the physical discipline of children by parents can be addressed by focusing on a number of factors. Like the SKIP initiative, this study will look at methods of parenting support which help provide parents information, education and support to best suits their needs. This study looks to begin where refugee parents are at, and so focuses primarily on the parenting support needs which are paramount to positive parenting.

Our project's long-term aim is the establishing culturally appropriate and effective parenting support for refugees resettling in New Zealand. Our initial step is to provide a scoping study of how the SKIP concept can be best transferred and adapted to meet the needs of refugee communities in the Wellington region.

We feel that the SKIP message is an important one; however it will require careful targeting if it is to be effective. With this in mind we have undertaken this scoping study to:

- Identify specific parenting needs for refugees in the Wellington region
- Identify particular considerations and best practice in responding to those needs
- Identifying possible areas for action in responding to those needs

RMS Refugee Resettlement has 25 years experience in the provision of resettlement services for refugees. We are a national based organization that co-ordinates resettlement support through cross-cultural workers, social workers, and the training and supervision of volunteers. RMS provides advocacy and support in the areas of housing, benefit assistance, education, immigration and general social services.

Among its many resettlement activities RMS Wellington also co-ordinates the Refugee Issues Forum, this forum provides a space for communication between refugee communities and service providers. Within the resettlement area there is a growing focus on the need to support community development initiatives, to work with communities and families to empower them to support themselves. At present RMS, with the support of the Changemakers Refugee Forum, are looking to establish a community development team within the organisation to build the capacity of refugee communities to support their own resettlement needs. The SKIP project is seen to be complimentary to the community development aims and objectives, and an opportunity to develop parenting support which is responsive to the needs and cultural values of our former refugee communities.

While focusing on the strengths of former refugee communities a holistic approach that acknowledges the specific challenges and cultural needs is required for effective

support. Many of the resettlement challenges former refugees face relate to changes in family structure, roles, and altered informal social support networks. For parents there is concern as their children are exposed to very different cultural norms than in their own childhood. These challenges are compounded by educational, communication and language barriers, trauma and grief, cultural differences, inter-generational dislocation, single parent families, a lack of support for women and children, and poverty issues.

SKIP and all good parenting support services recognize that there is no one model for parenting education, and that the overarching right of parents is to raise their children according to their own cultural values. At present the SKIP material is not accessible to former refugee communities due to language, cultural and poverty related barriers. Through collaboration, consultation and community generated knowledge we hope to develop culturally appropriate and sustainable methods of parenting support for Wellington's Refugee communities. Crucial to the success of this project is that our core values come from strengths based philosophy. This means the study will look to highlight what being a 'good' parent means in different ethnic contexts, and facilitate the vast parenting knowledge and resilience that people from refugee backgrounds own. Furthermore the study will focus on generating ideas and avenues to support refugee communities to support their own communities and families.

This scoping study has been carried out in three main phrases. Phase One involved initial consultation will service providers, refugee community representatives, and the establishment of a steering group to guide the research. A comprehensive literature review was also drawn together, to focus the research, and to ensure that we learnt from the experiences of parenting support providers and refugee communities nationally and internationally.

Phase Two involved conducting eleven in-depth semi-structured interviews with service providers from NGO's, government agencies and schools. Six in-depth semi-structured interviews, and one focus group session were also conducted with the refugee community leaders, representative and community members. The communities who participated in the study include; the Iraqi, Assyrian, Somali,

Sudanese, and Ethiopia communities. A detailed account of their experiences and opinions can be found in Section Five.

Finally, Phase Three of the scoping study has involved the write up of this report, its continuing dissemination, and follow up on actions and opportunities for collaboration that have arisen over the course of the scoping study.

## **Section Three – Literature Review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In Aotearoa there is a growing focus on providing adequate support and education for families so that all children have the opportunity to grow up in loving, stimulating and secure homes. The Ministry of Social Development has developed the SKIP programme, Strategies with Kids/ Information for Parents, to promote positive parenting that utilises non-physical discipline for the 0 to 5 age group.

Recognising the multicultural nature and make up of Aotearoa's society means acknowledging that parenting programs need to be accessible and culturally appropriate for our diverse families and communities. Thus providing effective parenting support means upholding the fundamental right of parents to bring up their children within their own culture and value system. For former refugee communities in Aotearoa there are significant barriers to accessing the material and support offered by the SKIP program. This scoping study looks to address the needs and barriers that parent's in former refugee communities in the Wellington region face, and identifies possible methods for accessing appropriate support.

The framework of this literature review and study are informed by three main theoretical concepts:

- Community development (Chile, 2004; Munford and Walsh-Tapiata, 2001; Nash, Munford and O'Donoghue, 2005)
- Strengths and solution based models (Ministry of Social Development, 2004; Nash et al., 2005)
- Ecological and systems models (Agass and Preston-Shoot, 1990; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nash et al., 2005) which are holistic and address the whole the environment and context within which life occurs

Community development models entail a process of working with, and for communities to allow them to make meaningful decisions about how they wish to



lead their lives. Community development therefore aims to challenge power structures, and facilitate the voice of previously marginalised groups. Due to the nature of the refugee journey, and the transition to a new home refugee communities on the whole lack adequate input into the design and delivery of services for their well-being. There is a growing call from former refugee communities and service providers in Aotearoa to work towards community development goals (Bihi, 1999; Chile, 2002; Howlett, 2003; Ryan, 2004; Wellington Somali Council, 2004). This project endorses community development methods and models as its theoretical framework.

Furthermore it is essential to note that refugee communities possess strength and resilience, and that these values need to be built upon so that children have the opportunity to grow up in safe and loving homes with secure cultural identities. Thus strengths based practice acknowledges that communities must be involved in defining their needs, barriers, and strengths and that the solutions for empowerment lie within the communities themselves. In strengths based models the process of empowerment is a key factor in working effectively with parents, families and communities.

To facilitate the delivery of parenting support, the diverse family and social contexts which refugee families face during resettlement need to be taken into consideration. There are many barriers to successful resettlement and integration for refugees who experience forced migration, these include pre-migration factors such as trauma and loss experiences, and limited preparedness and knowledge of the country they will be resettled into. Post-migration factors that impact resettlement success include the changes in informal social and community support networks, family separation and access to adequate housing, education, and employment opportunities. (NZIS. 2004). The ecological model recognises that positive parenting for former refugees occurs within this context, and that these broader factors which influence family and social systems must be identified and incorporated into any solutions.

This literature review will look to gather relevant literature, project evaluations and documentation on the provision of parenting education and support for former refugees who have been resettled in a third country. The material on this specific

area is sparse, however there is a growing body of research on refugee resettlement both here in Aotearoa and abroad. This material will be drawn upon to look at the needs and barriers for refugee families, and to look at what we do know about supporting former refugee communities. Additionally there is a multitude of literature on the provision of early childhood education and support in a multi-cultural setting, and this will be identified and used to inform the study.

## 3.2 Refugee resettlement in Aotearoa

### 3.2.1 History and definition of refugees

Aotearoa began accepting refugees after the Second World War, as the issue of displacement of people due to warfare became a global concern. Since this time people from Eastern Europe, South East Asia, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa have been resettled in Aotearoa.

Refugees have been forced to flee their homes due to persecution because of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. Through no fault of their own refugees may have been forced to leave behind homes, family, possessions, and their country. Many have been victims of torture, trauma, loss and deprivation both in their homelands and on their journey to safety. Because of these experiences refugees who arrive in Aotearoa have very different experiences and needs than other migrants, nor do they have the protection of another country, or the choice to return home. (RMS, 2005).

The 1951 United Nations Convention defines a refugee as:

*"owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."*

Aotearoa is a signatory to the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, under these

documents we have certain responsibilities to provide for the protection and resettlement of refugee people.

Today 80% of the world's refugees are women and children, there are an estimated 17.1 million refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced that the UNHCR report (UNHCR, 2005a). Of this number only 13% receive UNHCR mandate status, and only 26000 were resettled in a third country in 2003 (UNHCR, 2005a). Durable solutions for the well-being of refugee populations include three options, the first is repatriation to their home country, the second is integration into the country of first asylum, and the third is resettlement is into a third country. This third option is thought to be the final resort as the huge difficulties that accompany the resettlement into a geographically and culturally distant country.

### **3.2.2 Immigration categories for refugees**

Each year the New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS) selects a Quota of UNHCR mandated refugees to come to Aotearoa. In current years this quota has been set at 750 people per annum. Refugees are selected in this group because their protection needs are deemed high priority. There are also categories for women-at-risk, and those with medical or disability needs that would be best met in a country like Aotearoa, within the annual Quota system. Other ways in which refugees or people from refugee backgrounds can migrate include Convention Refugees (asylum seekers who have had their refugee status approved), and family reunification categories (open to all immigrants). Previously there was a humanitarian category that allowed for residence to be granted to family members due to the undue hardship of separation and the humanitarian nature of the case. This category was abolished in 2001. In its place there is a Refugee Family Quota within the Family Sponsored Stream that caters for 'extended' family members who do not fit within other categories, there are 300 places in this quota annually. These groups have different entitlements to services, and often have quite different experiences of resettlement support. (NZIS, 2004).

The government contracts a number of agencies to provide resettlement support for newly arrived refugees. RMS Refugee Resettlement is a national NGO mandated to

provide resettlement support and advocacy. This support is provided through the training and co-ordination of volunteers, cross-cultural workers, and social workers. The aim is to help refugees settle into communities and help them link into major services, (such as doctors, schools, ESOL education, WINZ, HNZC, community law centres), and provide ongoing advocacy support. There are also a number of other organisations operating in the Wellington region that provide specific support for refugees and migrants, these include MCLaSS, Home Tutors, RAS (Refugees as Survivors), and community based organisations.

### **3.2.3 Defining Resettlement**

Resettlement is seen as both a process and an outcome. Successful resettlement means being able to integrate into the local community, and find secure homes and livelihoods. Former refugees need to be able to access services, and make the most of opportunities so they can participate equally in mainstream society.

The UNHCR defines resettlement as:

*“Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them – as refugees - with permanent residence status. The status provided should ensure protection against refoulement and provide a resettled refugee and his/her family or dependants with access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals. It should also carry with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalized citizen of the resettlement country.”* UNHCR (2005b:2).

Theories of resettlement often make note of the relationship between integration and assimilation. Integration implies the capacity of groups to interact positively with the dominant culture, while maintaining their own language and cultural practices (Valtonen, 1994). While assimilation implies a process where the new culture is absorbed into the mainstream culture, and is unable to maintain and retain their

customs and values. The Wellington ChangeMakers Refugee Forum<sup>1</sup> (2005) aim to achieve successful integration and resettlement for Wellington's former refugee communities by creating:

*“ A city in which New Zealanders from refugee backgrounds are able to live their lives like every other New Zealand citizen; able to enjoy the same rights, perform the same duties, access the same services and make the most of opportunities and challenges they encounter, in order to live happy, independent lives.”*

This ability for refugee groups to integrate and maintain their cultural identity is shaped by a number of factors. Dona and Berry (1999) assert that these factors include pre and post-migration experiences, and will be different for each individual and community group. Pre-migration factors involve issues of trauma, and the knowledge of the country they are to be settled in. Post-migration factors include such things as the relationship with home, relationship with others of their diaspora, and the relationship and with the host society (Krulfield and Camino, 1994).

Berry (1980) developed a simple framework to gauge the outcomes of settlement on cultural identity. This is achieved by asking two main questions:

Is it valuable to maintain my cultural identity?

Is it valuable to have positive relationships with the larger society?

Answers	Outcome
Yes/Yes	Integration
Yes/No	Separation/segregation
No/Yes	Assimilation
No/No	Marginalisation

Source: Berry (1980) in NZIS, 2001.

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<sup>1</sup> The ChangeMakers Refugee Forum is a pan-community organisation established by refugee community leaders in Wellington in August 2004 to advocate and carry out action orientated initiatives and capacity building activities to increase the opportunities and social inclusion of all people from refugee backgrounds.

This framework displays the importance of cultural identity in the resettlement process, which is supported by a large volume of literature, such as Berry (1997), Bihi (1999), Fridland and Dalle (2002), Krulfield and Camino, (1994), and Liekind (1996).

While maintaining a positive cultural identity and building good relationships with the dominant society is crucial to resettlement success. Often there are commonalities in the experiences and process that newly arrived refugees will progress through. The Refugee Council of Australia (2000) highlights these stages of resettlement as:

Stage	Characteristics
1. First Arrival	Learning about the new place, mixed emotions, and immediate demands of finding housing, income etc.
2. The Honeymoon Stage	Things start to work, and the immediate anxiety of arrival is over, but many issues have not been faced yet. This period is frequently quite short.
3. The Crash	When the realisation occurs that life will be hard in the new country. Often depression is a characteristic of this stage, questioning the decision to leave, feeling isolated, mourning what, and who, have been lost, and intergenerational conflict and spousal tension.
4. Participation or Being Parked	Either of two scenarios can occur from here. Participation sees the realisation of goals, and a sense of belonging and contributing to society. While Being Parked relates to the non-achievement of goals, and deeper prolonged isolation and depression.

If participation is to be a goal or outcome of positive settlement, we need to understand what participation or social inclusion means. International literature on settlement highlights three main areas of where participation of refugee and migrants needs to be seen. These include:

- The capacity to establish a strong family, home and community
- The capacity to make choices to participate in the economy and workforce
- The capacity to participate in local and national affairs. (Ryan, 2004).

### 3.3 The needs and barriers to resettlement for refugee children and families

#### **3.3.1 Introduction - Family and community support and the equality of access**

In the past 10 years there has been growing recognition of the ethnic diversity of Aotearoa. In the 2001 Census over 105 of the population recorded their ethnicity as something other than New Zealand European, Maori and Pacific Nations. There is a need to improve the service delivery to ethnic minority families in two main areas; improving access to mainstream services, and developing specialist services for particular ethnic communities (Ministry of Social Development, 2004).

Equality of access to services is an overriding need for both former refugee and migrant communities. This means that current services need to be flexible enough to accommodate people from different ethnicities, for example the provision of trained interpreters in all government services, and gender appropriate doctor-client relationships for women whose culture demand this. Yet equality of access also means that communities should be helped to build their capacity, and access sufficient funding, space and support to have their own services to meet their particular cultural and social needs.

Today the holistic model of family support prevails as an effective way of working with families (MSD, 2004; Munford and Sanders, 1999). This section will take a holistic look at the needs of refugee families, and the barriers they may face in fulfilling these needs. Particular emphasis will be placed on the needs of children, parents and their families. There is a growing body of research and consultation with refugee communities in Aotearoa (Bihi, 1999; Chile, 2002; Howlett, 2003; Ibrahim,

2004; MacGibbon, 2002; *Refugees Voices*, 2004; Ryan, 2004; Suleiman, 2002; Wong, 2003). These documents provide greater depth and attention to the needs of refugees than this section can provide, and should be referred to to support the information cited here about the needs and barriers to refugee resettlement.

### **3.3.2 Social support systems**

The resettlement process is one of disruption and change, and is often characterised by trauma, loss and uncertainty. Once people have arrived there is a strong need to make reconnections and build positive relationships with their own and the host community. Many refugees come from cultures with strong reliance on community and family structures, and there can be dislocation in adjusting to a Western, more individualised society. Guerin et. al. (2003) note that adjusting to changing family relationships, generational conflict and capitalism are some of the biggest stresses on refugee families.

While it is important that general services and refugee advocacy services are accessible to refugee communities it is essential to build upon more naturalised informal social networks. This means looking at the strengths that families and communities exhibit to support themselves. It is important that our resettlement processes facilitate the creation of large enough communities in the same locality to be able to adequately support one another and build reconnections (Elliot, 1997).

#### **3.3.2(i) Cultural maintenance and acculturation**

These reconnections within communities allow for the maintenance of secure cultural identities, and ideally positive acculturation. There is growing concern in former refugee communities that children are losing their first language, and cultural knowledge. Consultation with the Somali community in Christchurch showed that women were worried for their children:

*“ The problem of our children is lack of our language, culture, heritage and traditional games. Some of the children, particularly the ones born and raised here in New Zealand, they do not know Somali language and are not familiar*



*with their heritage...We want to have classes for our language and our culture, as well as for our traditional dances.” (Ryan, 2004: Christchurch Focus Groups June 2004).*

There are many barriers for communities in accessing support to retain their culture. These include issues of inadequate financial assistance, poverty and resettlement trauma, and a lack of capacity within communities to advocate and carry out these activities.

### 3.2.2(ii) Capacity building and community development

*"The best way to help refugee children is to help their families, and one of the best ways to help families is to help the community.” (UNHCR, 1994:8)*

Ryan (2004) notes that the government is now beginning to focus on community-based social services for refugee and migrant communities. Facilitating participation will help build strong, vibrant ethnic communities. Ideally the “emphasis will be on helping refugee and migrant communities to develop and deliver social services, where appropriate, for their own communities” (Ryan, 2004:2).

Bihi (1999) identifies this type of social support, and believes that community organisations are best placed to provide services, and foster community ownership, cultural maintenance and participation of refugee communities in society. However refugee community organisations require financial support and technical advice to build their capacity to carry out these tasks (Bihi, 1999).

The Refugee Issues Forum<sup>2</sup> (2005) agrees with the need to build strong communities and enhance their capacity. At present there is a lack of strategic direction for supporting communities, and the current ‘silo’ funding approach is not working well enough (Refugee Issues Forum, 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> The Refugee Issues Forum is a monthly forum for service providers and people who work with refugee communities and individuals in Wellington to enhance collaboration and communication, and to strength work within the refugee sector.

Finally there is strong need for communities to be able to access community spaces, (e.g community halls or ethnic centres), where people can gather to celebrate their culture and support one another. The lack of appropriate spaces is a large issue for many, and both Bihi (1999) and Howlett (2003) address this barrier to community development in their research.

### **3.3.3 Gender**

The experience of refugee men and women can be quite different. This is because of the gendered role of women at home, their experience of persecution, and due to the different gender roles the host society may possess.

Refugee women may be more dependent on their husbands, and have more responsibilities for childcare and domestic duties. The heavy burden on women, combined with the resettlement and refugee experience, will impact women's experience and ability to cope with the resettlement process. Often one of the largest barriers women face is a lack of access to appropriate childcare and parenting support. Ibrahim (2003:4) comments that "childcare is essential for women to effectively function in the community and to undertake personal development activities". The current provision of childcare is too expensive, culturally inappropriate, and there are often too many forms to fill out (Ibrahim, 2003).

Women often experience social exclusion, and feel tied to their families and house. There are limited opportunities for women to attend ESOL classes, exercise activities, and information sessions about living in Aotearoa (Bihi, 1999).

These resettlement needs and the barriers to meeting them are compounded for women who are solo parents. New Zealand has a women-at-risk category in our quota refugee program. But as Mandeson et al. (1998) suggests in the Australian context, just because these women and their dependants are now living in a Western environment does not mean they are no longer at risk. Manderson et al. (1998) advocate for specialised post-arrival services to meet the separate needs of women-at-risk, and women who are solo parents. They point out that women alone need extra

help to access services and childcare, integrate and socialise, find employment and cope with mental illnesses.

Women from traditional cultures often have had limited educational opportunities, and they require more support in learning than many men do. Stanton (1995) found that 95% of Somali women living in Wellington had difficulties with general English proficiency.

Culture is often carried and maintained by women. Bihi (1999) states that Muslim women may experience racism because of their religious practices and the way they dress. Muslim women in hijab are very visible in mainstream Aotearoa, and this may highlight the feeling of difference and isolation. There is pressure on women, from both men and women, to continue to behave in culturally appropriate ways. Often this culturally appropriate behaviour has stricter guidelines for women and girls, and these requirements are in strong contrast to the behaviours of women in Aotearoa.

Cultural responsibilities also impact a women's role as a parent. Guerin et.al. (2003) comment that women are concerned about bringing up their children in a society with such different values. More support is need for women in parenting and cultural change, as this can be a large site of generational conflict and family stress, as children are socialised and grow up in Western societies and schools.

### **3.3.4 Children and Young People**

Children and young people are often capable of picking up new cultural values and habits sooner than their parents, and other adults. This adaptation can create problems between the generations as children and youths from refugee backgrounds are thrown into New Zealand schools with little ESOL support for their special learning needs. The research of Humpage (1999) into the educational experiences of refugee children in Christchurch recognises that adjusting to a new schooling system and culture is a highly stressful process. Often children may have spent long periods of time in camps, they may have large gaps in their education and they frequently have experience trauma, and the loss of friends and family on their journey. On top

of these experiences children also have to cope with the loss of their culture, and adjust to a new environment.

The coping capacity of young people is said to depend not only on individual coping capacities, but largely on their families ability to cope with resettlement, and provide a secure and supportive home. Elliot et al. (1995) comments that effectively supporting refugee children means ensuring the well-being of their parents or caregivers.

### **3.3.5 Intergenerational breakdown**

Most refugees are women and children (UNHCR, 2005). This breakdown and alteration in family structures is difficult, and many refugee families resettled in Aotearoa have a sole mother as the main caregiver of the family. This is challenging for the Mother as she is often coping with the care of many children, Live (1996) states that refugee families tend to be larger and there is a higher number of dependants per household than in other New Zealand homes. This absence of male role models is particularly difficult for boys, because in many refugee cultures boys tend to be raised and disciplined by men (Guerin et al., 2003).

Guerin et al. (2003) suggest that generational breakdown is one of the hardest adjustment factors for Somali families in Hamilton. They recommend that there needs to be greater support for parents to understand that their children live in a different culture, and that there needs to be more room for parenting and cultural compromise. Furthermore they suggest that work needs to be done to increase parents involvement in their children's schooling.

Elliot & Gray (2001) assert that communication between parents and children may become increasingly difficult, as children attempt to protect their families from further pain. It may be hard for children to communicate problems they are having in schools, and in coping with past trauma. These dilemmas may become more entrenched and problematic as children and youths often assume a lot of responsibility because they are the first to acculturate and become bi-lingual.

### **3.3.6 Family reunification**

Family reunification is of top priority for refugees. Many comment that they will be unable to resettle successfully until they can remove the worry, fear and responsibility for their families who are still living in conflict zones or are still at risk. This can only be achieved by reuniting families as quickly as possible.

The benefits of family reunification are the increased health and well-being of New Zealanders from refugee backgrounds. Family reunion also provides social support networks, and strengthens both communities, and family capacities to effectively care for one another and integrate successfully. It reduces the sense of isolation and loss, and can sometimes lighten the financial burden of refugees who are supporting loved ones abroad.

However the current immigration system for family reunification is too expensive and unclear (NGO Sector, 2000). The cost of medical reports, documentation, fees and airfares are often very expensive for refugees who are struggling to get by in Aotearoa. Furthermore the lottery system, forms and categories for reunification are complicated, and there is insufficient support to help refugees complete this process. Finally the removal of the humanitarian category, has also disadvantaged refugees with special cases.

### **3.3.7 Health**

#### **3.3.7(i) Primary Health Care**

Gray and Elliot (2001) note that the discussion of physical health issues for refugees is limited, and site the NGO Sector (2000:39) as representing the general situation of refugees as:

*“...facing unique health problems. These are connected to the refugee experience and poor access to and use of health care in the country of origin and/or first asylum. Physical problems may include nutritional deficiencies, dental problems, tropical or parasitic diseases, poor immunisation status, and*

*infectious diseases including conditions of public health significance, for example tuberculosis and HIV.”*

Former refugee communities are high volume users of health services in New Zealand (SECPHO & Newtown Union Health Services, 2005). These greater health needs place additional levels of stress on the family system.

Finally, the need for properly trained interpreters is essential to making health care accessible for refugee populations. This requires interpreters of both genders who are easily available, and that these services are provided at low, or no cost.

### 3.3.7(ii) Mental Health and Trauma Issues

Refugee populations experience high levels of mental health problems. These problems are related to both their refugee journey, and the adjustment to a new culture. At present there is a lack of specially targeted mental health services to help refugees, Bihi (1999) and the Refugee Issues Forum (2005) both comment that the current trauma care is inadequate. For women there is a lack of appropriate provision for psychosexual and mental health problems associated with trauma, abuse and rape (NGO Sector, 2000).

Aside from specialised mental health services there needs to be a more holistic approach to refugee mental health and well-being. Generally communities and service providers need greater public health education about the effects of mental illnesses and trauma (North, 1995). In addition, there needs to be greater community capacity and more community development initiatives. By helping communities to better cope with resettlement, and to increase their social inclusion and access to social support networks we will be helping communities help themselves while maintaining cultural identity and pride.

### **3.3.8 Employment**

People from refugee backgrounds often have difficulty in accessing the employment, and spent a long time on welfare (Tito, 2003).

Tito (2003) in his thesis on the barriers to employment for Refugees from the Horn of Africa living in Auckland discusses the following barriers:

- language and communication problems
- lack of understanding about NZ working culture
- prejudice and discrimination
- Poor recognition of qualifications and past experience
- Low pay, low status and job insecurity
- That refugees often do not possess documents

Living on a benefit in New Zealand is not an easy task. The experience of poverty in a Western context is a challenging one for former refugees. Often the coping skills for living in poverty in their country of origin are not transferable to the poverty experience in New Zealand (Guerin et al., 2002). Learning to adapt to poverty in this environment increases the strain on the family unit, and on parenting styles. Guerin et al. (2002) also comment that most of the problems with parenting styles come from the history of poverty, and current poverty experiences. There is a pressing need to break this cycle by accessing both the labour market, and removing social exclusion in education, housing and health.

### **3.3.9 Education**

#### **3.3.9(i) ESOL learning**

English language learning is recognised as critical to successful social and economic resettlement in Aotearoa and abroad. Studies have shown that a lack of English language is associated with poor integration outcomes, and hinder the opportunities for participation (Chile, 2002; Shadbolt, 1996).

English classes need to be more widely available. White (2000) found that refugees and family reunification migrants had more difficulty accessing English classes than other migrants, and had more family duties that made participation more difficult.

The cost of ESOL classes is also a burden on refugees, and Bihi (1999) advocates for that least 520 hours of free ESOL learning for all refugees. This would bring New Zealand's provision more inline with that of countries like Australia and Canada.

### 3.3.9(ii) Education for children and youths

Age is an important factor in the resettlement experiences of children and youth people (Elliot et al., 1995). All refugee children will experience grief and loss, for family member and for their lost culture. How well they adjust and cope with these experiences depends on their past experience, how supportive the schooling and social environment they are entering in will, and most importantly on the capacity of their family and community to regroup, retain their culture and integrate.

Often a lot of weight is given to the concept of resilience in children. It is suggested that resilience needs to be seen as a quality that develops in people and something we can help foster in refugee children (Auckland UniServices Ltd, 2000). Schools are one of the most dominant and stable places for children from refugee backgrounds, this is an important site to focus on for supporting their needs.

The Ministry of Education employs Refugee Education Co-ordinators in each of the main regions. Their role is to facilitate and assist refugee youths in New Zealand schools. However the needs are great, and as yet there is no comprehensive policy for refugee youth education and development.

Areas where children and youths are struggling include a lack of ESOL and bi-lingual learning support, a lack of support with homework, poor relationships between the school and parents, and a general lack of understanding in the school system about the refugee experience. On top of this children from refugee backgrounds are coping with multiple other resettlement stresses the family may be dealing with.



### **3.3.10 Holistic approach to supporting parents, children and their families**

These resettlement needs, and the barriers to meeting them, compile to reduce the access of refugee communities to parenting support. At the same time these factors increase the levels of stress placed on the family unit. Therefore careful targeting of parenting and family support is required to address these issues, and build on the strengths and resilience that families from refugee backgrounds already possess.

Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa (ACYA) (2003) state that “often the linguistic, health and welfare issues within the resettlement process and the refugee experience overwhelms families’ traditional parenting knowledge” (p80). They argue that the current mainstream provision of parenting support is not accessible to refugee families because it is not culturally appropriate or acceptable, and does not acknowledge the contextual factors and needs of refugee families adequately.

The main barriers for refugee parents in accessing current parenting support and education available in Wellington include:

- Cultural appropriateness
- Language
- Communication channels
- Lack of appropriate transport
- And the stress of resettlement

## **3.4 Positive parenting – An overview to supporting families**

### **3.4.1 Aotearoa perspective**

Aotearoa has wide provision of services and support systems for children and their families. We pride ourselves as a peaceful and safe place for children to grow up in, and in most aspects these statements are true. Yet at present the special needs of children and young people have come to public attention, sadly, this is due to the

negative circumstances that our children have been experiencing. The rate of suspected child abuse and neglect reported to Child Youth and Family Services has skyrocketed; a 2003 UNICEF report rated New Zealand with the third highest rates of child homicide in the OECD, and the gap between rich and poor is the fifth highest (UNICEF, 2003 in Children's Issues Centre, 2004).

The ACYA NGO report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child commented that many children and young people experience poverty and inequality. The rates of violence against children and youth are too high, and many children encounter discrimination that limits their opportunities to participate in their communities, culture, and schools (ACYA, 2003: v). They acknowledge that steps have been taken by the government to improve the position of all children under the 2002 *Agenda for Children*, nevertheless swifter action needs to be taken to deliver these outcomes for all children. Importantly ACYA emphasises that these steps need to be taken within the context of children's families and communities, and need to be provided through holistic services and caring communities.

One of the focuses of the *Agenda for Children* is to reduce the amount of violence experienced by children (MSD, 2002a), this focus is also supported by the *Te Rito* document which concentrates on reducing the violence in families (MSD, 2002b). This reflects the growing professional and public concerns about the levels of violence children are subjected to in their homes. One area this debate highlights is the diverse range of attitudes towards 'smacking' and the physical discipline of children in Aotearoa families. There is conflict between the public and private spheres of children's lives, and whether smacking children should be a parents right. Studies into the attitudes of New Zealand parents have shown that at least half smack their children once a week, and the majority believe it is acceptable to smack them in some cases (Carswell, 2001; Maxwell, 1995; Ritchie, 2002 in Children's Issues Centre, 2004:7).

In law the physical discipline of children, within reasonable force, is permissible under Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961. This Section states that parents may "[use] force by way of correction of a child if the force used is reasonable in the circumstances" (s59, Crimes Act, 1961). In New Zealand law using force against

another adult, wife, husband, partner or stranger is called assault, and is a criminal offence (Epoch New Zealand, 2005). Therefore the only people adults are legally allowed to use force against are children within their care.

Today steps to reduce violence in children's lives use multiple approaches to parental and public education. These methods include; advocating for law changes, media campaigns, parental support programmes, expanding home, school and community based services, increasing child advocacy services, improving inter-agency and multi-sector collaboration, and broad based primary health interventions (Children's Issues Centre, 2004; MSD, 2002b).

### **3.4.2 Non-physical discipline and early childhood development**

There is a vast amount of research into early childhood education and development, and the importance of non-physical discipline. Early childhood is generally classified as children between the ages of 0 to 5, during this period children's developmental rates are accelerated and children are learning and exploring key concepts about behaviour, social interactions, their world and their place within it. At this time in children's lives it is especially important to give them a positive and nurturing environment in which to learn and grow.

Research into early childhood development shows that there are very few benefits from physical discipline aside from immediate compliance with the caregiver's wishes. However the negative social outcomes connected with smacking include:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Reduced intellectual development
- Reduced quality of parent-child relationships
- Mental health problems
- Reduced moral internalisation of values
- Negative effects regardless of ethnicity

(Children's Issues Centre, 2004: 17)

Many parents or caregivers use physical discipline to control their children's behaviour, and teach them lessons about right and wrong. Because of the correlation shown in research between smacking and negative developmental outcomes parents need to be given the skills to utilise positive methods of discipline to teach their children. The Children's Issues Centre highlights that the differences between positive discipline and negative discipline or punishment are great:

*"...positive discipline normally involves helping children to understand why certain behaviour is unacceptable and other behaviour is acceptable. Negative discipline focuses on doing what you are told in order to avoid being hurt or punished."* (CIC, 2002:10).

So, what then does positive discipline actually entail? The SKIP initiative has developed six principles of positive parenting that use non-physical disciplinary practices to effectively teach children about boundaries, values, and build good parent-child relationships. The six principles, see figure 2, were developed out of the consolidation of research on non-physical discipline. Importantly these principles are underpinned by the concept that there is no one best method for raising children and these principles must be seen in the cultural, social, and individual family context of parenting.

Figure 1 - The 6 SKIP Principles of Effective Discipline.

<u>The 6 SKIP Principles of Effective Discipline</u>	
1.	Parental Warmth and Involvement
2.	Clear Communication and Expectations
3.	Induction and Explanation
4.	Rules, Boundaries and Demands
5.	Consistency and Consequences
6.	Context – Structuring the Situation
(Children's Issues Centre, 2004)	

### **3.4.3 How do these principles work cross culturally?**

The issue with applying Pakeha or western concepts of parenting and discipline knowledge and support provoke questions of appropriateness, legality, and also questions about where cultural relativism begins and ends. These questions are difficult to answer as parents from refugee backgrounds represent a vulnerable population group that are having to cope with living and parenting in a totally new cultural context. However, they have a right to receive information about their rights and responsibilities in their new country, and to have access to new ideas and research. Yet there will always be risk of marginalisation when this information has been developed within a European framework, and is supported by the dominant culture. Terreni (2002) comments that the “dominant culture needs to be aware of and unpack the pedagogy of the early childhood education we provide.” Thus we must be aware of the pedagogy of the parenting support we may offer to former refugee communities.

To combat these issues refugee populations need to have a voice in the decision making processes regarding parenting support, and what values and systems they will choose to incorporate. In practice this decision making process around acculturation will never be clear cut, however there is utility in building the capacity of communities to make their own decisions about the way they choose to live their lives. The communities themselves are in the best position to choose whether certain ideas are appropriate, and how these ideas can be adjusted to suit the needs and values of their communities. Bihi (1999:122) supports this stance stating that there needs to be a “genuine participatory approach” so that refugees can make decisions about matters that affect their lives.

Where parents from refugee backgrounds are concerned, many need support with the multiple stresses of the refugee journey, and the isolation and social exclusion that is experienced during resettlement. Providing positive parenting support and alternative disciplinary tools gives parents skills, knowledge and options to choose how they wish to bring up their children. We must not under estimate the ability of individual refugee parents to pick and choose, and make meaningful decisions about the future of their families, so long as we provide them with adequate support to make these decisions.

Literature on refugee resettlement highlights that the process of acculturation and the development of positive cultural identities is key to building vibrant refugee communities and families (Bihi, 1999; Krulfield and Camino, 1994). It is noted that the cultural identities of individuals and the group/community change as the migrant communities interact and exchange information and values with the host community. Empowering communities to be able to maintain a strong ethnic identity, and integrate and participate meaningfully in the host society will impact how positive parenting messages are received.

### **3.4.4 Attitudes towards parenting support**

When looking at parenting support it is important to assess the ways that these positive parenting messages are communicated. It is now commonly accepted that one method or programme does not fit all communities, groups or cultures, and that parents need to be empowered to receive the type and style of support that they would like (Stephenson and Ranginui-Charlton, 1994). Tate and Tate (1999) comment that the most effective programmes prioritise parent's values, culture and needs.

#### **3.4.4(i) Ecological model**

The make-up of families and the social support networks that assist them have changed over time, as families and societies evolve for economic and social reasons. Today the focus of parenting support has moved away from the 'deficit model'. The 'deficit model' had placed the spotlight on parental or maternal deficiencies of lower socio-economic communities.

Parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds were targeted as lacking in the skills to be successful parents because indicators showed that life outcomes for these children were inferior to other groups. What this type of focus did was place responsibility for poor outcomes with the parent, instead of looking at the broader factors and stresses that affected the family unit, such as inadequate housing, employment, education and social support. In an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner,

1979), focus is placed on the whole system that families operate within, and is more in line with the 'whole child' approach advocated for by MSD's *Agenda for Children*. Shifting this focus gives recognition to the need for social change and empowerment, and more readily aligns itself with strengths based practice philosophies. Instead of parents being seen as deficit, some situations are seen as challenging and unjust, and programmes for parenting support need to be tailored to meet the needs of each particular setting.

#### 3.4.4(ii) Cultural relevance

Effective parenting support works by providing services for parents according to the particular individual's, groups or communities specified needs. Minority groups require services that are aware of these needs, and flexible enough to cater for and evolve with cultural diversity. Schapiro (1996) argues that casework and advocacy with minority parents is important because few of the mainstream services are cultural and linguistically appropriate. Providing services that are appropriate, and advocating for mainstream services to adapt to the needs of their clients from different ethnic backgrounds, is essential for outcome equality for refugee populations.

Slaughter-Defoe (1993 in Gray, 2001) highlight four key aspects in planning culturally appropriate services, these are:

- Assessing the cultural characteristics of each family being assisted, this includes looking at extended family relationships, the role of fathers, and family strengths
- Communicate effectively about the family goals for being involved in the program. Specifically, the programme must understand how families deal with everyday stresses, continually facilitate their feedback into how the programme can help them, and decisions should be made on a clear understanding of the groups history and culture.
- There should be cultural equality between the provider and participant. Ideally the facilitator, service provider will be of the same ethnic background as the family being helped.

- Use alternative programme formats flexible enough to meet the cultural needs of the participants, offering a wide range of services that incorporate a mixture of outreach and centre-based interventions.

### 3.5 Parenting support and education in Aotearoa

#### 3.5.1 What works?

Parent support works to help parents build positive relationships with their children. There is a broad range and type of parenting support available. Today one of the key acknowledgements of parenting support literature and evaluations is that there is no one model for success, and that programs may not be transferable between populations (Powell, 1992; Stephenson, and Ranginui-Charlton, 1994).

Characteristics of parenting support that have received positive appraisals from families participating include:

- Empowerment approach– valuing the knowledge and specific needs of parents, and letting them direct the focus of learning
- Multiple methods of engaging and assisting parents
- Support that includes both the parent and the child
- Peer support, and group based learning (Powell, 1992).

Key outcomes of receiving parenting education are that parents:

- Feel empowered
- Have their personal values acknowledged
- Have their own culture expressed throughout the course
- Become aware of the necessary skills they feel are essential for successfully parenting happy healthy children (Tate and Tate, 1999:21).

Many early childhood researchers and evaluators comment on the difference between the theoretical bases of *parent support* and *parent education*. Gorman and Balter (1996 in Tate and Tate, 1999) highlight that there is debate over the key values of both these types of intervention. Brown (1998 in Tate and Tate, 1999) states that



the aim of parent support is to strengthen parents capacity to draw on their own resources and the resources in their communities to support their children. While the aim of parent education is to provide information to develop positive parent-child relationships, and reduce harmful family behaviours.

Today there is a growing push towards holistic parenting support, which Carter and Kahn (1996 in Gray, 2001) label as family support. This means focusing on building the strengths of a family, rather than intervening into their weaknesses. In family support the family is viewed in its social, economic and cultural contexts and these factors are seen as inseparable from the way in which parenting or parenting support should occur. Munford and Sanders (1999) affirm the importance of understanding the context in which services are provided for parents of diverse populations in Aotearoa.

The different types of parenting support and education generally provided in Aotearoa range from class or centre-based programmes, outreach and home-based, playgroups, kindergarten and education focused assistance, and wraparound or multi-level support. This section provides a brief look at the parenting programmes available in New Zealand, for a more comprehensive see the Families Commission (June 2005) *Review of Parenting Programmes*.

### **3.5.2 Outreach and home-based support**

Home-based support or outreach support usually entails one-to-one support, and often involves a worker going out the parents home to provide assistance.

#### **3.5.2(i) Family Start**

A home based support programme is Family Start. Parents may be referred or may self-refer between 6 months prior to birth or 6 months after birth. Family Start supports babies who may be at risk due the social, education and health circumstances that affect the family. The Ministry of Education (2005) reports that “the Family Start programme provides high intensity, long duration services to the most at-risk families in a best practice design that is based on research and

evaluation.” The Family Start programme is available in 16 areas around Aotearoa, unfortunately the programme has not yet been made available in Wellington.

### 3.5.2(ii) HIPPY

HIPPY is a home-based support programme that aims to give parents and caregivers the skills to enhance their children’s social and cognitive development, and educational and life outcomes. HIPPY works with trained facilitators to work with parents with children around the ages of 4 to 5 years. Parents then work with their children on structured, enjoyable materials for 15-20 minutes a day, for 30 weeks of the year, for two years (Pacific Foundation, 2005).

The materials provide appropriate developmental activities for the parent and child to work on together, thus enhancing parent’s involvement in their child’s learning. Successes of the HIPPY include increase children’s participation in early childhood education, increase parents involvement in schools and the community, and building the confidence and esteem of parents (Pacific Foundation, 2005).

Increased involvement of refugee parents in their children’s education is a key goal for refugee communities and families (Abdi, 2004). The HIPPY program provides good tools for parents who are familiar with the New Zealand education system, have good English skills and have base understanding about European concepts of child learning. For refugee parents there may be many barriers to accessing HIPPY support, such as language and culture. This does not discount HIPPY as a useful programme, but it may need significant adaptation to be suitable for communities from different ethnic backgrounds.

### 3.5.2(iii) Early Start

This program aims to use home visits to foster positive family change to improve child health, parenting skills, family and maternal well-being, and crisis and economic management skills. It was piloted in Christchurch in 1995, and evaluated after 18 months. The main successes indicated were increases in family compliance

with immunisation, car safety requirements, and in ensuring that families were referred to the right type of agencies for support (Gray, 2001).

### **3.5.3 Programmes/Centre-based assistance**

Centre based assistance can include a wide range of services including parent education classes, drop-in and counselling/social work support. There is a lack of class or centre based program evaluations available Aotearoa. However research has emphasised that these programmes need the following factors to flourish:

- Be appropriately targeted, and have appropriate programme content
- There should be a high level of intensity in the delivery of the service
- Incentives should be offered for attendance. (Gray, 2001).

### **3.5.4 Playgroups**

Playgroups are a community generated group that gathers together up to 3 times per week for up to 3 hours so that parents can play and learn with their baby or pre-schooler. Playgroups do not require the same sort of regulation to be established as other early childhood establishments because parents are obliged to stay with, and take responsibility for their children during the session. Playgroups are usually held at a local community venue, and can receive small amounts of funding for equipment and toys.

Currently the Ministry of Education has contracted Early Childhood Development to provide funding to allow communities and groups the chance to establish their own playgroups. However this structure does not take into consideration the challenges for people from refugee backgrounds to take advantage of these opportunities. Firstly, there needs to be a mechanism where parents can learn about the importance of learning through play and early childhood development, this includes concepts like why children in New Zealand settings learn through playing in sandpits and with playdo etc. (Steering Group Meeting, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2005). Secondly, communities from refugee backgrounds often do not yet have the capacity to organise, and access funding for their own groups. The policy requirements for establishing a playgroup

do not recognise the need for specialist support and capacity building (Terreni and Coker, 1998).

In Wellington the Ministry of Education playgroup co-ordinator is piloting a supported multi-cultural playgroup at the WCC Arlington Flats in central Wellington (Read, 2005). So far the playground has proved very successful, with around 10 to 15 parents and caregivers attending the once weekly groups with their babies, toddlers and pre-school aged children. The co-ordinator is in attendance each week, takes an attendance role (as per funding requirements), and brings toys and activities. The co-ordinator has a more active role than other playgroups that are run by parents, but this is essential to the set-up and momentum of the group. The co-ordinator commented that she need not play too active a role in the group, and wanted to foster the idea of parents as first teachers. However, by her regular attendance meant that she was able to build relationships of trust with the parents and caregivers, and she felt more comfortable passing on positive parenting advice and information (Read, 2005).

The successes of the project are that the venue is accessible, and most parents live in the complex. This location means transport and travel requirement are minimal, and that other parents can see the playgroup when it is underway and are motivated to come down and join in. It provides an informal learning environment, where children and their parents can learn and play alongside one another. Additionally the project provides mothers the opportunity to socialise together, and it reduces the feeling of isolation. Parenting education benefits are that it gives parents an opportunity to see children at different ages and developmental stages, thus giving parents an opportunity to learn first hand about early childhood development and parenting skills. Mothers at the playgroup commented that they would attend the playgroup more frequently if it was available (Mothers at the Arlington Playgroup, 2005).

There are also Pacific Islands Early Childhood Groups (PIECG), Nga Puna Kohungahunga, and community language playgroups. Community language playgroups are either total immersion or bilingual playgroups that provide opportunities for language maintenance, which is important for early childhood

development and maintaining a positive cultural identity. The Ministry of Education in 1992, *Aotearoa Speaking For Ourselves*, stated “language is central to our individual and group identity, being the principal medium by which knowledge, ideas and cultural values are transmitted”.

In 1998 there were 14 community language playgroups in Aotearoa, and 5 of these were located in Wellington (Terreni & Coker, 1998). These groups provided 5 main objectives for ethnic minority parents or caregivers, that included:

- First language maintenance
- A place to exchange cultural information
- Educational opportunities for children and adults in their first language
- Social opportunities for children and adults within their own cultural group
- Support for parents and caregivers. (Terreni & Coker, 1998)

The creation of total immersion community playgroups is an exciting opportunity for former refugee communities. Providing an informal space for learning and gaining parenting support may be an effective way of delivering positive parenting information in an accessible and cultural appropriate environment. It also addresses the needs and barriers for refugee parents in accessing support, by combating isolation, language and cultural barriers, and providing an environment where parents and children can learn together.

### **3.5.5 Wraparound or Multi-level Services**

Multi-level service provision or wraparound services means that a variety of interventions and support are made available. Often this can include a combination of home-based support, parenting programmes, and advocacy.

#### **3.5.5(i) Parents as First Teachers - PAFT**

Parents as First Teachers (PAFT) provides home and community based support to parents in the first 3 years of their child’s life, and is a comprehensive and broad

reaching style of support. Initially PAFT was criticised because of its American origin, and questions arose about whether this type of programme could be appropriately applied to the Aotearoa context. Furthermore many people in the early childhood sector were unsure where PAFT would be positioned in Aotearoa's early childhood education system. Both these concerns have led to changes in the programme. (Farquhar, 2002).

PAFT provides both group based learning and outreach home support for individual families. The programme operates from a strengths based perspective, and has received good feedback from Maori participants as a culturally appropriate form of parenting support. Results from the evaluation found that parents were more comfortable with home visits, but that attendance to group meetings was poor. The evaluation showed parents felt PAFT accepted and supported families culture, positive feedback was noted by Maori parents when the educator was of their same ethnicity. (Farquhar, 2002).

#### 3.5.5(ii) *Whanau Toko I Te Ora*

*Whanau Toko I Te Ora* is a parenting skills programme delivered by Te Ropu Wahine Maori Toko I Te Ora Maori Women's Welfare League. It provides a tamariki-centred and whanau based programme, targeted at those with high needs. The support aims to provide parenting skills through a holistic approach by looking at tamariki development, and general family support. (Livingstone, 2002).

The evaluation notes that improvements were made in parents' patience and understanding of their child's developmental needs, and that this was facilitated by parents having more involvement with kohanga reo and schools. Success lay in the broad-based nature of the programme, which looked at all areas of family life and how this affect parenting. *Whanau Toko I Te Ora* took an incremental approach, and provide long-term support and assistance. This type of assistance was aided by the strong relationships built between the kaiwhina and the mother receiving support, and by the fact that the service was designed and delivered for Maori, by Maori. (Livingstone, 2002).

Important lessons that can be learnt for refugee communities include looking at how services were targeted at those with high needs, which acknowledged the large levels of stress these families were under and that support should not be isolated in one area of the families life alone. Refugee families often experience high levels of stress in many areas of their lives during resettlement. Furthermore the delivery of support by someone of the same culture was beneficial for building trusting relationships and understanding. This programme is an intensive style parenting support, which could be beneficial for refugee families experiencing numerous difficulties, however it is also a cost intensive method of parenting support. Mainstreaming services and collaborating with other organisations to make programmes of this nature accessible to parents from refugee backgrounds may be a direction for future programmes.

### **3.5.6 Kindergarten and educational linkages**

#### **3.5.6(i) Awhina Maatua/Parent Support**

Awhina Maatua / Parent Support was launched by Early Childhood Development in 1990. The program looks to use community development models of intervention to help communities who were not previously accessing early childhood education receive the right kind of support. This method of delivery was recommended by the 1987 Roper Report on Violence.

Communities targeted in this project usually live in low-cost, high-density housing or in rural areas, both with limited access to transport. Support is then customised to the needs of each community, and looks to build sustainable community generated early childhood and parenting networks. The programme has four stages, which include consultation, development, implementation and withdrawal. A Ministry of Education co-ordinator works alongside communities to discuss needs, solutions, and the community makes collective decisions about the type of early childhood activities they would like in their area. Often new projects and playgroups are developed out of this type of engagement.

### **3.5.7 The Maori and Pacific Nations experience**

### 3.5.7(i) The Maori Experience

#### Kohanga Reo

Te Kohanga Reo was developed as a response to the need to provide Maori language and cultural education, and was a major part of renaissance of Maori culture. In 1981 a proposal was developed to provide total immersion Maori language and tikanga in early childhood services. Its primary aim was to ensure the survival of Te Reo Maori.

Te Kohanga Reo translates to “language nest” and involves total immersion of children between 1 and 6 in Maori language and cultural schools. Since the introduction of these programmes the numbers of mokopuna enrolled in early childhood education has dramatically improved. Whanau are directly involved in the decision-making processes of the Kohanga Reo. By 1990 there were already over 600 centre in operation (Middleton *et al*, 1993 in Stephenson & Ranginui-Walker, 1994).

Kohanga Reo has had a huge impact on the early childhood education sector. Furthermore, the work, lobbying, and successes of the movement have allowed it to be used as a prototype for other ethnic groups who want to facilitate and ensure the maintenance of their first language and cultural.

#### Atawhaingia te pa harakeke: Nurture the family

*“Atawhaingia Te Pa Harakeke* is aimed ultimately at the safety and on-going wellbeing of Maori children. It is a programme that recognises that the true power for children’s safety and wellbeing rests with parents.” (Te Komako, 2005). The programme uses Maori tikanga and values to provide skills for parenting and creating healthy home environment. This programme focuses on two strands of support, for both parents and children.



The programme arose as a response to family violence in Maori homes. It looks to build cultural pride and knowledge, and is governed by principles of te tino rangatiratanga (self-determination). The programme is delivered by Maori, and has provided training to over 90 Maori organisations and Iwi, and “directly assists Maori and Iwi groups to provide whanau support services within their own communities” (Te komako, 2005).

*Atawhaingia Te Pa Harakeke* is a useful model to consider because it incorporates culturally appropriate guidance for Maori people, and also delivers this information through Maori support channels. The programme acknowledges that all Maori want the best outcomes and environments for their family and tamariki, as is with former refugees. However for this information to help parents have healthy secure families, it needs to have its origins within that particular culture, and not simply just transfer Pakeha or Euro-centric models of healthy families. This also helps build cultural pride and secure cultural identities, a lack of these are often a factor in intergenerational and family dysfunction in both Maori and refugee families (Krulfeld and Camino, 1994; *Puao-te-ata-tu*, 1986).

### 3.5.7(ii) The Pacific Experience

#### *Anau Ako Pasifika Project*

*Anau Ako Pasifika Project* is a home-based program that looks to assist the whole family, in the Pacific context this includes the extended family as well. The content and delivery of the program is tailored to the needs of the family. Evaluations of the project found that it was a good service to help pre-schoolers and their families make the step into centre-based education/kindergarten, and that parents developed greater skills and confidence in their parenting (Morgan, 1991 in Gray, 2001). A strength of this project was that it was run by Pacific people for Pacific people, and this meant there was a greater understanding between of the challenges and strengths of Pacific communities.

### 3.6 Parenting support with refugee communities

### **3.6.1 The Aotearoa Context**

There is limited provision of parenting programmes specifically for refugee communities in Aotearoa (ACYA, 2003). However there is a growing push from refugee communities and service providers to make these programmes accessible and appropriate for former refugee families. Currently a number of parenting projects have been established in response to community requests for support and education about parenting bicultural children and teens. The model of support that has most frequently been utilised has been individual community focused parenting programmes/classes, which are sometimes combined with generalist wraparound social service support for families.

#### **3.6.1(i) MCLaSS Parenting Support**

In 2003 MCLaSS, a Wellington based ESOL and education support organisation for refugees and migrants, received funding from the Ministry of Education to train parenting education facilitators from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Eleven people participated in four days of training which equipped them with skills to deliver a 6 session parent education program focussing on: positive language, adolescents development and signs of trauma, parenting a bicultural youth, parenting adolescents, handling problems/boundary setting, and building strong relationships. These skills learnt by facilitators were also reported to be important information that could be transferred through informal networks, such as community leaders, elders, and friendship networks. (MCLaSS, 2003).

The programmes were set up within the Assyrian, Somali, Ethiopian communities and a mixed ethnicity course was held for Muslim parents at the local Mosque. These courses were of mixed gender (except for the Mosque course), mostly ran in the evenings, and generally focused on parenting teenagers. Successes across these programmes included the use of bicultural facilitators who connected well with parents, and could relate personal and cultural experiences within the course. Parents reported that they enjoyed having time together to share experiences of resettlement and acculturation. They also commented on learning important skills on effective communication and how to build strong relationships with your children.

MCLaSS reported that the most successful programme was the Mosque based programme as it ran alongside a mother's group, and children's Islamic classes. Additionally, the facilitator already had established relationships with the women, and the core values of the program focused on was how to be a good Muslim parent. The facilitator used the skills she learnt in the training course, and her own religious knowledge and values to develop program material that was appropriate for Muslim parents.

Challenges that MCLaSS facilitators faced included:

- Parents not valuing the classes as much as ESOL classes
  - Parent's were not interested in learning parenting skills because of the other stresses, and poverty were seen to be of higher priority in their lives
  - Parents who attended sessions already had quite good skills as parents, and it was difficult to attract parents who needed support
  - There was a lack of male attendance
  - Parenting education is a new concept, thus affecting parents willingness to attend formal courses
  - Communities worry that information is not culturally appropriate, and were concerned about changing their parenting style to a NZ style
  - The programs did not come from the communities
  - Fractionalisation within communities altered attendance – literacy levels, clans and social groups were some issues that caused fractionalisation.
  - Differences in expectations, as many mothers were disappointed when facilitators did not solve their problems
  - An unwillingness to talk about problems within the family in a group setting.
- (MCLaSS, 2003).

The program poses questions about the sustainability and utility of providing formalised classes for refugee communities. As a concept providing support for families in a classroom based setting is quite a western notion. The challenges faced throughout the programme highlight the complexity of providing parenting support, and suggest that looking at providing multilevel support that assists parents through a

variety of methods many be more effective in reaching different families within communities. Research into effective parenting support emphasises that programs may not be transferable between populations and that support should link into natural community based social networks (Ellis, 1998; Stephenson and Ranginui-Charlton, 1994). Thus in looking to provide appropriate parenting support attention needs to be given to informal support networks within refugee communities, and into more familial and informal learning environments.

### 3.6.1(ii) Rintoul St Somali Women's Playgroup

The Wellington Somali Council works to promote and support the cultural, religious, economic and social well-being of the 2000 some Wellington Somali community. The community identified the needs of mothers and small children as a priority area for community development. Somali women with children often experience isolation, social exclusion and a lack of access to appropriate support systems. This is due to the high demands of looking after large families, the small numbers of male elders and role models within the community, a lack of childcare and transport, culturally inappropriate services, and limited English language levels.

The community identified that there were many Somali mothers with small children living in the Rintoul St Flats. With the support of the regional playgroup co-ordinator, the Plunket nurse, and the Wellington Somali Council a playgroup was formed once a week. The aims of the group are to reduce isolation by allowing the mothers a chance to socialise together, assisting their children to learn through playing, and providing a culturally diverse space for learning.

Concerns have been expressed by refugee parents in Aotearoa that their children are losing their home language (Howlett, 2003; Ryan, 2004). Early childhood development research shows that not only is first language maintenance essential for “maintaining group identity, solidarity and cultural heritage” (Arthur, 2001: 103) it is also positive for children's intellectual development, and self-esteem and identity.

### 3.6.1(iii) Refugee Resettlement Support

Refugee Resettlement Support (RRS) is the social services agency in Christchurch that carries out social support, and service provision for Christchurch's refugee community. The organisation has a social work ethos, and takes a holistic approach to supporting individuals and communities. They provide family counselling, family interventions with CYFS and the police, community bilingual workers, health promoters, and community development and youth work.

RRS offers parenting education programmes at the local ESOL training centre, one evening per week. The venue has a crèche attached, and it is known to most members of Christchurch's refugee communities. Its central location is important to the programmes accessibility. RRS provides either transportation or childcare for the duration of the parenting programme. In their opinion it is important not to provide both of these services as it is necessary to have community buy-in to the programmes. However RRS acknowledges that both these factors are large barriers to refugee communities' ability to access parenting support. (RRS, 2005)

These courses have been provided periodically for a number of years, as funding allows. In 2005 they have received funding from SKIP to provide these programmes. The programmes work by employing a parenting educator, and an interpreter to work with the group. So far a programme with women from the Somali community has been established, and numbers of women who attend the course fluctuate.

Key factors that RRS feel impact the success of these courses include:

- being flexible with the numbers who attend the course, and being prepared to work with different sized groups
- building on strengths of the community
- asking the community about what type of information they would like the course to cover
- providing reassurance about NZ systems – such as Child Youth and Family Services and the Police
- small groups were more effective

- have a parenting educator who is prepared to work *with* the group, who relates well to the parents, and does not need to stick to a set agenda or structure of programmes

Barriers for the parenting programme and the educator included:

- the logistics for some refugee families in getting to the programmes, i.e. transport, and large numbers of children requiring care
- Fragmentation within communities – which affect attendance by certain groups.

A crucial element of RRS' ability to effectively deliver parenting support is that the organisation also offers wraparound social services to support refugee parents, children, and families. The parenting programmes are backed up by, and link into the family counselling and intervention services, trained social workers, cross-cultural workers, and a community, youth development and health promotion team.

RRS believes that providing parenting support through a programme based setting (i.e. where there is a facilitator/educator and a classroom environment) is an effective means of communicating vital information. They feel programmes are useful because they provide a setting and space where women can come to talk specifically about parenting, and socialise together. Even providing parenting education and information to a small sector of each refugee community can have flow on effects, as information is passed on through oral and informal support networks. These types of project outcomes are difficult to measure, but are essential outcomes and spin-offs from parenting programmes. Furthermore, they suggest there is a responsibility to provide parents from refugee backgrounds information about their rights and responsibilities as a parent in Aotearoa. (RRS, 2005)

#### 3.6.1(iv) Glenn Innes – Burmese Community Parenting Programme

The Department of Community Relationships and Responsiveness, RAS Refugees as Survivors, the Auckland University Faculty of Education, and members and leaders of the Glenn Innes Burmese community worked together to provide a parenting education programme. The course was held at the local Marae over 8 weeks for 2 ½

hours on a Friday evening. Two community members provided childcare and refreshments, and a community leader who was also a RAS counsellor facilitated the course.

Topics covered in the programme included:

- Understanding our family in a changing culture – developmental and resettlement life cycles
- Understanding our children – understanding the challenges and coping behaviours
- Responsible parenting – Burmese and NZ contexts
- The power of encouragement – strengths and positive support focus
- Effective discipline – adapting boundaries in a new cultural setting
- Communication Training I – improving family communication
- Communication Training II
- Summary and feedback. (Department of Community Relationships and Responsiveness, 2004).

The feedback showed a positive response to the programme. It is noted that key elements of the programmes success was that it worked under community development principles where the need for, and the content/focus of the course were identified by the community themselves, and that the course was facilitated by a community member (Janif, 2005).

### 3.6.1(v) MSD Auckland - Somali Community Parenting Programme

The Department of Community Relationships and Responsiveness focuses on building the capacity and capabilities of communities to provide services for themselves. In 2004 the department worked with the Auckland Somali community to help them gain information about parenting.

A 13-week workshop was held to provide information around parenting issues that the community had requested. Topics included were; parent teacher relationships, services for parents, and setting boundaries for children. The program was delivered

in Somali language, and an interpreter was used when service providers came to present material. This increased the communication flow and how the material was received, and was a key factor influencing the workshop's success. Community involvement in all the major stages of the project ensured that it was culturally and linguistically correct.

The community decided that the workshops should be held on a Sunday so that other family members would be at home to provide childcare, so that the primary carers could attend. Approximately 30 to 50 mothers were present at each session. The large attendance levels at these workshops displayed the success of this programme. At the conclusion of the course participants identified needs and support that they require for the future, they recommended that support in parenting teenagers was required.

### **3.6.2 The International Context**

#### **3.6.2(i) ReWA Refugee Women's Alliance – Seattle USA**

ReWA started providing a Parent's Education program in 1992 as a response to concerns expressed by refugee parents about raising their children in the United States. The program provides multi-level support through providing:

- Parent education workshop
- Parent Support Group
- Home Visits
- Case Management and social services

The program aims to give parents skills, information and support to assist them with parenting in a completely different culture.

The **Parent Education Workshop** is facilitated by bilingual/bicultural staff, and parents can attend sessions in the morning, afternoon or evening. The course also provides childcare on site, refreshments, and a stipend for transport and other related costs. The program content is broad and covers areas such as the school system,



homework, communicating with schools, law, health and safety, family violence, discipline, and employment issues etc.

The **Parental Support Group** is for former participants of the education workshops, and it aims to create an ongoing supportive environment among parents. It also has goals of empowerment and advocacy for parents, and provides a space for further learning. The third level of support provides **Home Visits** to provide for the specific needs of individual families on a case management type basis. (ReWA, 2005).

ReWA emphasises that access is an important issue that limits refugee parents opportunities to participate meaningfully in their children's development and schooling. The overriding rights and needs of parents from refugee backgrounds is "to have their questions answered, however, they need parenting information that is culturally appropriate and linguistically accessible." (ReWA, 2005).

#### 3.6.2(ii) Red Cross Queensland

Queensland Red Cross undertook an Action Research project to develop a greater understanding of the cultural adaptation and integration issues faced by former refugees from the Horn of Africa region. The study showed that these communities were very concerned about parenting and family support issues. The study also focused on the strengths of the communities from these regions and that these skills needed to be taken into account in service provision. From this research a culturally appropriate parenting plan was developed, which focused on community capacity building and actively supporting parents.

#### 3.6.2(iii) Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Services Cahill (2005).

In March 2005 the Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Services in NSW, Australia established a parenting support programme aimed at sole parents and parents on Temporary Protection Visas (TPV).

Programme values included supporting the capacity of vulnerable communities, and reducing isolation to create environments for healthy and secure children. Four types of intervention have occurred through the programme, these are;

- Enhancing Social Connections – social and recreational outings
- Information Sessions – general information sessions for Sudanese mothers
- Parenting Workshops – collaboration and training community parenting facilitators
- Capacity Building – supporting Sudanese women to establish here own organisation

The programme has been effective in helping reduce social isolation, and in helping small communities build connections with the main stream community.

#### 3.6.2(iv) Daycare Trust – First Base Training to refugee women from Somalia and Eritrea

Daycare Trust offered training to refugee women to improve the lives of their children and their families changes of resettling successfully in London by helping mothers learn about childcare and development. The programme aimed to act as a introduction to further education and employment.

The training ran for 80 hours over a 10 week period, two days per week. The programme encouraged participation and discussion. Provision of this course was also supported by outreach work, interpreters, childcare services and help with travel expenses.

The programme was successful and received positive feedback from participants; one mother commented;

*“Even though I am a mother and have brought up children, I have learned more about the children, the needs of parents and equal opportunity.”*  
(Programme Participant in Sheriff, 1995: 25).

### **3.6.3 What are some lessons we have learnt?**

The experiences of refugee parenting support programmes in Aotearoa and abroad have taught us that targeted support for refugee parents is needed. Targeted support needs to consider:

- The language difficulties that refugee populations many face, and the need for interpreting support or mother tongue programme delivery
- The lack of access to childcare and affordable transport
- That refugee parents may be unfamiliar with the concept of parenting education
- That many refugee parents are struggling with integration and the tasks of resettlement, they may have more pressing practical concerns that need to be addressed before parenting support r education can begin
- Programmes need to be culturally appropriate in delivery and content, employing and training people from refugee backgrounds to deliver parenting programmes has been useful
- Programmes that incorporate religious values have been useful
- Parents are concerned about parenting their children in a cultural unacceptable manner
- Programmes that build on informal social support networks are effective
- Parents need to know about their rights and responsibilities as parents in Aotearoa
- Information needs to be translated into community languages
- Programmes need to consider the gender differences within communities and families
- Ideally programmes will provide multiple methods of intervention, such as outreach and centre or group-based support
- Programmes should work from a community development perspective
- Support needs to target house-bound parents

- Any support services need to be aware of the diversity within refugee communities, and that one type of programme will not suit all people within that community
- Providing activities that ensure the maintenance of secure cultural identities is crucial to successful resettlement, and to happy healthy parents, children and families.
- That parenting support for refugee communities is important, and needs to be prioritised.

### 3.7 Summary

This literature review looks at the need to provide accessible parenting education and support for former refugee communities in the New Zealand context. The situation of refugee resettlement in Aotearoa is briefly discussed, along with a discussion on what constitutes successful resettlement.

The needs of refugee parents are distinct from other groups of society. Careful tailoring of support services is required to meet the special needs of this sector of the population. In particular services need to acknowledge the challenges and barriers to accessing positive parenting help, and look to work with parents and communities to empower them as confident bi-cultural parents.

## **Section Four - Methodology**

The key aim of this scoping study is the identification of community endorsed methods, and inter-agency collaboration, for the design and provision of positive parenting education and support for former refugee parents with children in the zero to five age group.

The research looked to engage with two main groups via in-depth semi-structured interviews, or a combination ‘interview guide’ and ‘informal conversational’ interviews (Patton, 2002). The first group consisted of Service Providers who were, or could possibly through the nature of their work be involved in providing parenting support to former refugee parents. The second group involved refugee community leaders or representatives, from the Assyrian, Iraqi, Sudanese, Somali, and Ethiopian communities.

The project was conducted in 3 phases, these involved:

- Phase One – Planning and Literature Review
- Phase Two – Data Collection
- Phase Three – Report Development and Dissemination

### **4.1 Phase One - Planning and literature review**

Phase One involved the formation and initial meeting of the steering group. The role of the steering group is to ensure that the research is conducted in a culturally appropriate, and ethically sound manner. The steering group has met three times over the course of the research to provide project advice. Please see Appendix Two for the steering group Terms of Reference.

Rationale behind the employment of a steering group was to ensure that when conducting cross-cultural research sufficient consideration to ethical issues. These included the methodology of the research, and that certain cultural and ethical issues are considered from various cultural and knowledge viewpoints. Patton (2004: 391)

notes that “cross-cultural inquiries add layers of complexity to already complex interactions of an interview”. With this statement in mind, the steering group was essential for negotiating these complexities by reviewing and suggesting questions, engagement methods, and other considerations pertinent to the parenting role.

Possible steering group members were identified through RMS Refugee Resettlement and the researchers networks. Three key questions were drawn up to assess who would be appropriate people to be on this committee. The key factors for selection were:

- 1) People who come from refugee backgrounds and are parents themselves
- 2) People who have knowledge or experience in the provision of parenting education and support
- 3) People who have research backgrounds, and understand the challenges of conducting research with former refugee communities

Steering group members did not have to meet all three criteria, but it was essential that all of these areas were represented. Additionally it was also considered important that both genders were represented in the group. A list of possible candidates was drawn up, and a project management meeting was held to identify who would be most appropriate. These people were then telephoned about the project, and sent an information pack detailing the research, the SKIP programme, and the Terms of Reference for the steering group.

Everybody approached was keen to be involved. The steering group was made up of the following people:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Experience</b>
Samson Sahele	Ethiopian community leader, father, and is currently conducting research into the education experiences of refugee youth and their families.
Amal Ramachandran	Middle Eastern migrant, mother, Amal runs a women’s group at the Wellington Mosque, and has previously facilitated Muslim women’s parenting courses.

Jayne Franklin	Head teacher at Wellington South Kindergarten, actively involved in helping families from diverse ethnic backgrounds access child and family support, Jayne is also a mother.
Koos Ali	Somali community leader, mother, and works for Regional Public Health looking into the health and well-being needs of refugee communities.
Penny Bond	Ministry of Youth Development – refugee youth advisor, Penny also works on a voluntary basis for the Wellington Somali Council, Refugee Children’s Trust and the Changemakers Refugee Forum, and has a research background.

The second stage of Phase One involved the construction of a literature review, this was undertaken to bring focus to the study, and clearly identify and utilise other knowledge on the factors affecting refugee parents in Aotearoa and to look at what types for parenting support had previously been offered, and its impact.

The Literature Review looks at issues of:

- Refugee Resettlement in Aotearoa
- Needs and Barriers to Resettlement for Refugee families
- Parenting Support and Education in Aotearoa
- Parenting Support with Former Refugee Communities

The methodology for locating literature included Keyword searches of major academic databases under following key terms; ‘refugee\*’, ‘parents’, ‘support or education’; ‘cross-cultural’, ‘parent\* support’; ‘refugee\*’, ‘New Zealand’ ‘resettlement’; and ‘New Zealand’, ‘parent support’ or ‘parent education’.

Other methods for locating research included speaking to other professionals in the field working on refugee and migrant research, this included government agencies, and NGO’s in New Zealand.

It was also recognised that a lot of parenting support for refugee communities internationally would be undertaken by NGO's. An internet search was done on 'Goggle' to locate any such projects, and any organisation located was approached via email, and asked for any possible information or reports evaluating their programme.

## 4.2 Phase Two – Data collection

The research used qualitative interviews to engage with:

- Service Providers
- Community Leaders or Representatives

In-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted surrounding the needs of refugee parents, the accessibility of services, and best practice in the provision of parenting support services.

This methodology has been chosen because there is a need to gather information and experience rich data. The scoping study is action focused, and therefore it is important to access people and organisations with direct knowledge about the situation of refugee families, and parenting support available in the Wellington region.

The in-depth semi-structure interview refers to a combination of 'informal conversational' and 'interview guide' approaches (Patton, 2002). By providing an 'interview guide' the interview is standardised and structured, this is particular useful for two reasons. First, a wide range of diverse organisations were able to be interviewed, and second, it provided the participants with prompts and discussion points prior to the interview so they have a clear idea about types of question that were to be explored. Combining this approach with the 'the informal conversational interview' "offers the interviewer flexibility in probing and in determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth, or even questions about new areas of inquiry that were not even anticipated..." (Patton, 2002: 347). This



flexibility was important are seeking diverse experiences, and creativity about possible methods of collaboration for new service delivery.

A list of possible organisations to approach was drawn up, this list was categorised into two sections, firstly organisations whose core activities are to provide services to refugees, and secondly organisations who are involved in supporting parents and families. Groups within the first section include:

- Wellington ESOL Home Tutors
- Refugees as Survivors (RAS)
- Newtown Union Health – Refugee Team
- Changemakers Refugee Forum
- Pomare Union Health Service
- Porirua New Settlers
- MCLaSS

The second section includes:

- Strathmore Community Centre or Kindergarten
- Mt Cook School
- Plunket
- Wellington City Mission
- Barnados
- PAFT – Parents as First Teachers
- Parenting with Confidence – Parents Inc.
- CYFS
- CAFS
- BIRTHRIGHT Wellington
- Presbyterian Social Support

All organisations on this list were contacted via telephone, and the research was explained to them. Interested organisations were sent an information pack. The pack included, these documents can be found in the Appendices:

- Project information sheet

- Managers information sheet
- Participant consent form
- Service Providers interview questions

Each individual who agreed to participate in the research was asked to allow one hour to one and a half hours for the interview. The venue was arranged between the researcher and the participant. All interviews occurred at either the offices of RMS Refugee Resettlement or at the offices of participants. The interviews were tape recorded, and participants were asked to arrange a quiet space free from disruptions. Participants were asked if they were comfortable with the interview to be tape recorded, if not, notes were taken during the interviews instead.

In total, eleven organisations participated in the research. Participant organisations will receive a copy of the final research report.

In-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted by the researcher with community leaders and representatives. These interviews followed the same format as the interviews with service providers. However the questions discussed differed, please see the Appendix for the Community Leaders Interview Guide.

Topics discussed included:

- what makes a ‘good’ parent in your culture
- what are strengths of parents in your community
- what are the networks you use to provide information and support for families within your community
- how can we build on the strengths in your community to better support parents
- what are the parenting needs of your community,
- what sort of projects or support do you think would be most appropriate for your community.

Community leaders and representatives were identified through RMS and researcher’s networks. Community leaders were identified because of their status

within their community, as representative from their own community organisations, their high level of English language ability and cross-cultural capacity, and through their membership to the Changemakers Refugee Forum.

A mixture of male and female community leaders or representatives were interviewed; six of the seven interviewees were themselves parents.

There was one variation from the in-depth semi-structured interview format. The responses from the Assyrian community came from a focus group situation, where the community representative asked women from the Assyrian community the interview guide questions in their monthly meeting. This method was followed based on the community representative's advice, as she felt that the women would be best qualified to answer the interview questions for themselves, and that it would be a good chance to start the women talking about parenting issues.

There are many ethnical issues that arise when conducting research with refugee communities. As a group refugees tend to be a disempowered population, who are struggling to cope with the resettlement process, and with the uncertainty of their past and present experiences.

Bihi (1999) in his research on the cultural identity of Somali's resettled in New Zealand choose to conduct in-depth interviews with three different actors in the area of refugee resettlement. These groups were 1) NGO's and service providers' 2) government employees and policy makers, and 3) Somali refugees. When deciding on the sample of Somali refugees Bihi (1999) interviewed community leaders and community workers. These individuals were accessed due to *"their high degree of involvement with refugee issues. They are seen as people who can provide valuable insight not only because of their individual experiences as refugees, but also because of what they know about the experiences of other members of the community"* (p16).

Bihi's (1999) selection facilitated the gathering of high quality qualitative data, yet due to the gender roles and hierarchies of the Somali culture most of those interviewed were older males. When research issues that effects the whole community, and particularly when looking at issues of parenting (which can often be

seen as ‘women’s work’) are discussed, it is important to access women’s views and involvement.

Therefore it must be seen as a limitation of this research that, apart from with the Assyrian women, the research has failed to engage with mothers and parents at a community level directly. In the initial project proposal RMS also aimed to engage with refugee community members, unfortunately these interviews have not been able to proceed due to organisational capacity and time constraints. While this is a limitation, as Bihi (1999) suggests the responses of community leaders are of great value, and suggest many insights into the parenting needs of their communities, and possible areas from action.

Another ethical consideration was how to conduct cross-culturally sound research, considering the principle researcher was not from a refugee background. Instead came from the mainstream dominant culture refugees were integrating into. As Rubin and Rubin (1995: cited in Patton, 2002) highlight;

*“You don’t have to be a woman to interview women, or a sumo wrestler to interview sumo wrestlers. But if you are going to cross social gaps and go where you are ignorant, you have to recognise and deal with cultural barriers to communication. And you have to accept that how you are seen by the person being interviewed will affect what is said” (p.39)*

Key aspects that heightened and helped enhance the level of the cross-cultural understanding and communication firstly included the community leader’s high level of English and experience in negotiating the boundaries between Kiwi culture and their own.

Secondly, the researcher had an established relationship with the community leaders. This has developed through work for RMS Refugee Resettlement as a volunteer and student social worker and as a community development worker for the Wellington Somali Council and the Changemakers Refugee Forum. Having this pre-established trust with the community leaders and representatives enhanced the quality of communication. As Guerin (2004) suggests, the key to successful research with

refugee communities entails building relationships and trust, which involves being there and helping with activities and projects outside of the main focus of the research.

#### 4.3 Phase Three – Report development and dissemination

This phase involved bringing together the project and the production of the final report. It is intended that an application, or applications, for further funding to establish recommended projects will also be produced.

A research launch and presentation will be held in March 2006 with participants and key stake holders. Preliminary action is also underway to develop research recommendations with community, NGO and government partners.

#### 4.4 Summary

This scoping study has been conducted through a process of community and stakeholder consultation, and qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews with refugee and mainstream service provider agencies, and with community representatives from some of Wellington's most recently arrived refugee communities. In total eleven service provider interviews were conducted, and six interviews and one focus group with community representatives were held.

The research process was supervised by a steering group made up of parents from refugee backgrounds, and research and parenting support specialists. The process has been fluid and reiterative, and involved ongoing consultation and discussions to discover opportunities for making parenting support more accessible and culturally appropriate.

## **Section Five – Interview Data**

### **5.1 Data from interviews with Service Providers**

#### **5.1.1 Introduction**

All the service provider organisations interviewed were involved in working with people from refugee backgrounds in varying degrees. For some, working with refugees was their core activity, but with the majority provided services to the mainstream population group and were increasingly being accessed by refugee communities or had an awareness of this growing demographic group. These groups ranged from specific refugee mental health organisations to schools and government agencies.

Organisations interviewed included:

- 1) Wellington Plunket
- 2) Mt Cook Primary School
- 3) Newtown Union Health Service
- 4) RAS Refugees as Survivors
- 5) Ministry of Education
- 6) CAFS – Children and Family Services
- 7) CYFS - Child Youth and Family Services
- 8) Wellington City Mission
- 9) Parents Inc
- 10) PAFT Hutt Valley
- 11) NET Parenting

The interviews conducted were informal and semi-structured, and engaged with service providers about their involvement with parents from refugee backgrounds, about the challenges and strengths of these parents, and about ways to more effectively support parents with children in the 0 to 5 age range who are from refugee backgrounds.

The methodology for undertaking these interviews has been a combination of informal conversational and interview guide approaches (Patton, 2002). As discussed in Section Three this methodology was undertaken to allow for flexibility within the interview to pursue the variety of perspectives and experiences of the diverse organisations interviewed. The loose interview guide given to participants provided them with a clear picture of the types of issues and experiences that would be discussed, allowed for continuity across this range of organisations interviewed, and to make the best use of busy NGO workers and service providers' time (Patton, 2002: 343).

Due to the fluidity of the informal conversational interviews data has been grouped into thematic sections; these sections include:

- Important values when working alongside refugee parents
- Challenges in working alongside refugee parents
- Opportunities and considerations for providing appropriate parenting support

### **5.1.2 Important values when working alongside refugee parents.**

Key values that were identified by service providers for working alongside refugees included building trusting relationships, having an understanding and respect for the culture of the family you are working with, understanding the refugee journey and the impact that loss and trauma may have on a family's ability to resettle effectively, having a strengths based focus, working in partnership with communities, respect, and celebrating cultural and individuals diversity. Participants values included;

*“We need to have trust and sensitivity to where parents are at, and be prepared to work in a long-term manner... We also need to understand cultural meanings, like somatisation, and to focus on and respect the strength and resilience of families”*

*“getting the base right - what are these key values - an acknowledgement of where you have come from, and what you have been through – the trauma – emphasizing that where people have been taking the time, talking to people and getting to know the families, the more you realise how amazing they are, and they need to feel they have a right to be here.”*

*“Key values for social workers would apply across cultures. You go back to the community and get an understanding of the culture, and build on that. You then ensure that you provide the appropriate intervention.”*

### **5.1.3 Challenges in working alongside refugee families**

Working with refugee parents is often a new experience for many service provider agencies in Wellington. As these populations continue to grow, more and more mainstream organisations will be involved in supporting refugees. The complexity of the refugee experience, individual responses to trauma and resettlement, the differential health concerns of this population group, and cross-cultural communication skills are new issues that workers wish to further develop skills and understanding in to enhance the quality of their work (Nash & Trlin, 2004).

Challenges that Service Providers identified in working alongside refugee parents and families can be categorised under the following headings;

- Communication
- Working with Cultural Difference
- Negotiating Gender Roles
- Supporting Basic Needs Acquisition
- Accessing Services and Information



### 5.1.3(i) Communication

Most service providers noted that communication is often one of the largest barriers to working effectively with refugee populations. Often refugees have limited English language abilities, and a lack of understanding about New Zealand terminology and processes.

Working effectively across the language barrier requires the use of trained interpreters. Three main issues in using interpreters were highlighted, firstly, that many NGO workers lack specific training in how to effectively use interpreters. Secondly NGO's have limited budgets for using interpreters and a lack of history in needing these extra resources; the *"language barriers are huge challenges in accessing services... the cost of interpreters is not included in NGO budgets because they don't have a history of needing it, this is hugely difficult"*. Thirdly, service providers identified that often individuals within different refugee communities, particularly those with oral communities, are frightened about using professional interpreters due to issues of confidentiality, they state that *"language and communication is the biggest challenge, just understanding one another... and that sometimes clients don't want interpreting services because of a fear of gossip in the community"*

A final communication issue identified was that young children are struggling with communication in early childhood education settings. Although research suggests that young children are most able to adapt to a new environment and language (Hamilton et al, 2000), a lack of communication can test the resilience of children who are learning to cope with a new learning methods and environments. Interviewees identified that this inability to communicate effectively can be frustrating for children, parents and staff; *"kids are struggling to cope with the language in kindys, and not being able to communicate and experiencing different discipline practices, such as time out, is confusing and frustrating"*

### 5.1.3(ii) Working with cultural difference

Learning to work cross-culturally was a challenge that many service providers recognised, one participant commented that taking the time to understand the cultural meanings and communication patterns was important for building positive relationships with parents;

*“For new staff its understanding the ways culture works, Somali women are quite fearsome, and its hard if you can not understanding these messages, and that this is the way they relate. We tell new staff to take the time to stop and talk and build a relationship, it’s about making people feel that they can come in...”*

Beyond working cross-culturally some service providers noted that many mainstream agencies fail to fully understand the differences between refugees and migrants, and how coming from a refugee background impacts the resettlement process and the parenting role;

*“there is a lack of understanding in mainstream services, such as CAFS and CYFS, about the specific backgrounds and issues that refugee parents and children experience”*

A failure to properly understanding the circumstances and issues that refugee families face may create a barrier to working with families effectively. Not understanding cultural meanings, or the fear and lack of trust some refugee families have for authority will have a grave impact on any support offered; *“there are lots of blind spots, and people don’t know the consequences of their actions”*.

All service provider participants recognised that finding the appropriate community contacts were important steps to gaining a better understanding of how to work with parents in a culturally appropriate manner. There were varying levels of contact with community leaders and representatives across the agencies, some had good relationships with community leaders and were comfortable approaching them, and would go to the community first if a situation arose. While others noted that they

were unaware of whom to contact, unsure about the tribal divisions and affiliations, and were unsure of how these contacts would impact the confidentiality of their work.

*“Its getting an understanding of the culture, finding a key member to contact is seen as an issue. It was difficult in the Somalian community to find someone who represented the whole community. There were different factions with different agendas. We thought we were talking to the group we should be talking to and then we would have other groups come forward. This was difficult...[it would be great to] know who the community leaders are, having an open relationship with those people so if they have questions or concerns, and so we can phone them for advice with no fear of repercussions....”*

Having the right community contacts and good relationships with these communities has proved effective for a number of service providers interviewed, and remains a goal for those who do not have these relationships. One participant highlighted that while she could not do the work she does with refugee children and their parents without the support of community leaders, these individual community leaders are over consulted and over burdened by organisations requests for help and consultation; *“Community leaders are over burdened, they are unpaid, and everybody tries to link in with them for information and advice”*. In Wellington, there are only a small number of community leaders who have the status within their community, the bi-cultural skills, and the time and willingness to cope with the many demands of advocating and representing their marginalised communities.

A further challenge for both service providers and refugee parents is that each culture has very different parenting practices and styles. Interviewees noted that there were many differences between how parenting occurred in a more mainstream New Zealand environment and in family's homelands or countries of asylum. Service providers recognised the challenges of not wanting to impose their culturally dominant practices on families, but also grappled with how these differences will effective children's ability to learn and adapt to New Zealand systems. They highlighted simple issues such as differing routines between hot and temperate climates *“Routines in countries with different climates are brought here, and it's a*

*difficult adjustment when kids are going to school, you have kids having lunch when they come home from school, there are issues in adapting to kiwi routines”*

There was a lack of in-depth knowledge and understanding about specific parenting practices in the different refugee community groups, this reflects the variation between the different refugee communities, tribal groupings, previous urban or rural lifestyles, previous educational and social-economic status, the impact of the refugee journey, individual parenting styles, and of course the number of times service providers have worked with particular cultural groups. One issue raised was that Service Providers were unsure about whether families believed that children learn through play, and they noted that there were not many toys in homes, and had not often or ‘never’ seen mothers playing with their children.

#### 5.1.3(iii) Negotiating gender roles

Often the gender roles between refugee families’ countries of origin and New Zealand differ greatly. Many of the most recently arrived refugee communities in the Wellington region come from the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, where gender relationships are much more patriarchal than in New Zealand. A lack of male involvement in household activities and parenting support was seen as a challenge for some refugee families, this was problematic because often Mother’s are isolated, house-bound, and coping with much less family and tribal support than they originally would have received.

This lack of appropriate informal support networks and cultural gender expectations was seen to be a problem not just for women, and there is a lot of pressure from the community for men to maintain these more patriarchal roles;

*“There is no male involvement in parenting; they don’t do anything in the house. In an Assyrian family we worked with, the husband really wanted to help but was afraid of being ridiculed by peers”*

Service Providers noted that there appeared to be issues with male involvement in the parenting role, but that it was dangerous territory as you face complex issues of

cultural change. It was noted that these changes had to come from within the community itself, and that *“it is really key to have men in the community who can talk about parenting, and who can cross the cultural barriers because they are highly respected”*

#### 5.1.3(iv) Basic needs acquisition

Many parents from refugee backgrounds are still struggling with resettlement tasks and coming to terms with a new language, climate, and social, economic and cultural system. This presents a huge challenge to providing parenting support because often parents are battling to manage inappropriate housing, language barriers, transport issues, living on a benefit, health and trauma issues, understanding the New Zealand schooling system, worrying about their families aboard, and living on a benefit.

*“Sometimes we are not addressing mental health or parenting for a long time, firstly we are addressing the practical issues, this is particularly so for families with young children”*

For workers this means that before they can begin to help refugee parents with parenting issues, you must first support them with their most pressing demands, such as housing, family reunification, and so forth. Interviewees suggested that this situation applies to large numbers of refugee families they see, not just those who have recently arrived in New Zealand. One participant commented on a family they had worked with who had been in New Zealand over five years; the Mother had no English, was struggling to survive day by day, and had very little understanding of how things in New Zealand worked.

It was suggested that by addressing the wider issues that impact refugee parents and families in a more holistic manner we will have the most impact on supporting parents to raise happy healthy children;

*“They need physical concrete support first. They need in home support - hands on. Being able to broker things for refugee family - what are the customs? When mothers get plenty of support, the parenting issues really take care of*

*themselves. If there is housing, food, mothers can cope. There are huge issues of loss, they need to be emotionally available, so in being able to help the mothers you need to provide for mother's needs, help them so they can be available for their children"*

#### 5.1.3(v) Accessing services and information

A major challenge that service providers identified that affected their ability to support families was the lack of understanding of what support services were available.

*"If parents had a child that needed a service, firstly, they didn't know what the service was, secondly, they didn't know how to access it, and thirdly, they are not empowered to go and access it anyway. We have had children with an intellectual disability, with no links with IHC, and not understanding what resources are available; this family had been here for 7 years".*

There was criticism of the lack of specific support for refugee families once they have finished their six weeks in Mangere orientation centre in Auckland, and have been resettled in the community. Participants also spoke of their concern about how we supported new arrivals and the complete lack of orientation information and very limited support services.

*"I don't know if we do a good enough job of helping people after Mangere with how you function and the things that are different and really positive about being here."*

#### 5.1.3(vi) Not understanding New Zealand society and the law

Not understanding what services are available, and not being able to access the information you require to build a good life in New Zealand also links into other issues related to parenting in a different society. Not being able to grasp the laws and systems that operate here in relation to children and parents, and their rights and responsibilities can be confusing and frightening.

Many communities have had negative experiences with CYFS, and lack an understanding about their role. Most refugees are unfamiliar with the social welfare state, and traditional matters concerning the care of children are dealt with by family or tribal processes. The government stepping into family situations can provoke a lot of fear and misunderstanding, particularly when people come from backgrounds where they have experienced state sponsored persecution and violence. Participants comment that;

*“There is a lot of fear and concern about CYFS, and people not understanding the processes”*

And;

*“there is a lot of fear of the Police and CYFS, lots of organisations do not understand refugees lack of trust...understanding the terminology of our society, like the idea of confidentiality which is not easily transfer to another language...and this is very frightening having somebody official coming into the home when you from these backgrounds”*

#### 5.1.3(vii) Finding culturally appropriate support

Another common challenge is the lack of culturally appropriate support services. In the Wellington region, there are very few social workers, counsellors, or health professionals from refugee backgrounds. This causes great difficulty for agencies working with parents and children because the right type of support is not available;

*“I am always looking for ethnically diverse counsellors and social workers but they are just not there”*

And;

*“Kids who are traumatised, and having to find appropriate counselling for them, I don’t feel a Pakeha counsellor is appropriate, I don’t feel they have a sense of culture, who they are – it’s a huge need – to have access to people from within the community. We often go through church connections. When we feel we need serious intervention we go to the community first, tapping into contacts in the community.”*

Refugee communities in Wellington are small, and all families are trying to cope with their own issues, such as finding work, supporting family aboard, and learning to live in a new country and so they have limited capacity and knowledge to provide support. Despite these constraints communities do provide a large amount of support to one another, but the lack of funding and capacity building support for community agencies so they can support their own was noted;

*“In my understanding the vast extended family shares in the parenting, but here you have families that come as nuclear families, only partial families, and you have young mothers that don’t have those skills. It’s not something you learn growing up it’s something you learn as you do it – other people show you the way – they don’t have the extended network. So parents are left in complete isolation, it’s a very depressing thing for families, they don’t know where to go get culturally appropriate support.”*

A further factor commented upon was that the needs of refugee families are extremely high, and services are not designed to best cater for these needs. More holistic and more adequately funded services would best suit refugee families, as they struggle with being pushed from one organisation to another, and as workers juggle to high a case loads to provide people the support they require.

*“There are not enough places to refer people too, and these services need to be more holistic to cater to the needs of refugee families. At the moment people [service providers] are under too much stress, everybody is just maxed out...there are just not enough appropriate services to deal with the needs”*

#### 5.1.3(viii) Intergenerational Conflict and Parenting Teens



The needs of parents and teens are recorded because of the frequency and urgency in which they were referred too by the research participants. Further justification for there inclusion relates to the paramountcy of the issue of intergenerational conflict brought up by Assyrian youth and African youth in research for the Wellington Regional Refugee Health and Well-being Summit in October 2005 (Evolve, 2005; VUW, 2005).

Participants commented that they were disappointed that this research project did not directly address the needs of teenagers and their parents, and how to provide parenting support specifically for this group, as it is an urgent concern.

Specific concerns that arose were around the issues that teenagers face in negotiating their lives between the mainstream ‘public’ culture which they may participate in at school and socially, and a very different set of cultural practices, beliefs and boundaries they experience at home. The challenges of living between these two cultures are compounded by the developmental stages teenagers go through of identity development and boundary testing.

Service providers observed that;

*“The children want to fit with their peer groups and the parents want them to retain their culture”*

And:

*“The huge issue is when the kids get to 10 or 11, when they do what kids do and start to push boundaries, in terms of what they can and can’t do, and I guess what really worries me is the fact that, the number of kids whose parents haven’t come to an understanding about the fact that, or do not want to come to the understanding that, kids that age living in a society like ours that is so different to their [country of origin] that they are going to need to think about how they maintain there relationships with there kids in order to keep them at home... Being aware of what stages there kids are going through, how its going*

*to manifest itself and how they are going to manage it so their kids are safe and that they still have positive relationships with them, [it is] a huge, huge issue, and I don't know what to do. The girl that went missing, it was because she had a boyfriend and was too scared to go home because she would be beaten up by her family because she had a boyfriend at 14. I am worried that someone will end up killed or injured because they have left home because they don't like what the family is saying. This is a massive really immediate problem, and these problems are not talked about in the family"*

Another issue noted was that there where a lack of positive role models, particularly for boys.

*"there are problems for boys because there are no father figures, because of some of the histories [conflict experiences] there are problems with domestic violence, so some of the role models that these kids actually have got are not exactly positive"*

In the opinions of the research participants the needs of refugee parents parenting bi/multi-cultural teens are high. These needs require further attention and research, and most importantly it requires immediate action to support parents and teens, so that they can maintain positive family relationships, stay safe, and become confident and healthy young adults.

### **5.1.4 Opportunities and considerations for providing appropriate parenting support**

#### **5.1.4(i) Community development approach**

A reoccurring theme of the interviews with service providers was that a community development approach needed to be taken to adequately support parents. The principles of community development entail the ideas of ownership and participation at all stages of an activity, empowerment and capacity building, and challenging the unjust structures of society which have meant that certain groups have been marginalised. Findings from the research that focus on community development methods for support provision have been categorised under the following headings;

- Empowerment and participation – Capacity Building
- Holistic Support
- Building Informal Support Networks

Empowerment and participation – Capacity building

*“Your best starting point is to train people up in the communities as parenting educators, that’s your best scenario. It’s about empowering communities to deal with these things.”*

Three quarters of those interviewed suggested that refugee community members needed to be empowered and supported to provide support to their own people. It was suggested that providing refugees with the appropriate training and workplace support would be the best way to support parents in a culturally appropriate manner. This was considered to be particularly important for marginalised groups, living in a dominant culture that is very different from their own. Participants thought that by employing someone from the communities own cultural group to provide support, new information and parenting methods could be understood within that cultures value set. Thus, providing the flexibility for new ideas to be adapted and taken on where appropriate, and ensuring that the parenting educator is able to understand cultural messages, boundaries, and can build strong relationships with parents.

By learning from the Maori and Pacific experience we will be empowering refugee communities to support their own, and be providing the most effective and appropriate support. Service providers commented that these ideas are not new in New Zealand, and that we need to look at how important culturally appropriate support is for Maori and Pacific communities;

*“the key would be getting somebody from the community trained up to provide services to there own community, I see the key to a lot of this is to actually place members from communities into positions where they have the knowledge, back up and support to be out there in the communities and working with their own. Use the structures and organisations that exist and get them to change to support these workers, all services out there have specialist workers for Maori and Pacific people, this too is required for the families we are working with, simply because the cultural barriers leads to a lot of distrust because they don’t understand, and we don’t understand.”*

It was recognised that by employing people to work with their own communities we will be utilising the skills of people already in the community. Unemployment and underemployment are huge barriers to successful resettlement. By employing people to do these roles we not only deliver the most appropriate parenting support for new communities, but build the capacity and skills of individuals within communities and families to be positive role models and to enter the New Zealand workforce.

One participant highlighted that we need to consider the type of workplace the community parenting educator would be going into, that this environment is flexible enough to allow different work styles, that this person has been able to access the right training for the job, and that they are adequately supported to do the demanding job of working in their own community;

*“we have people who are really skilled and knowledgeable, who happen to be in New Zealand, who are sitting at home or cleaning houses, we need to take these resources and firstly give them the appropriate training, and employing them in an environment where they are actually supported to do this work – it*

*would be so exciting – and at the end of the day we would be saving the country a fortune, because you are not going to have these families with CYFS, in the mental health and criminal systems, instead you will have families that are going to be raising healthy children that are going to be successful people in New Zealand”*

As noted above, focusing on prevention rather than intervention is the most cost effective and harm minimising way to support families;

*“there is too much being the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff, more proactive support is required, and the ideas for this need to come from the community”*

Finally, empowerment needs to occur during the provision of parenting support, but it also needs to be an outcome for all parents involved;

*“what I’d like to see is the refugee and migrant parents empowered to be one step ahead of the kids, and the kids need this too – they don’t know what the boundaries are if the parents don’t know. It has to start from an early age to be really effective – if parents are learning these skills now its going to make so much difference later on”*

### Holistic support

Functioning well in a society requires learning about how that society works, and negotiating these new systems. For many refugee parents they are struggling to understand how New Zealand services are provided, and have little say in how support is offered to them. Interviewees commented that for many refugees the large amounts of paper work, and the boundaries between which service provider provides what service was confusing, frustrating and marginalising.

If support is going to be effective these concerns need to be taken into consideration. More holistic service provision was seen to be important, especially for parents

juggling stressful lives and families, with English language difficulties, and for those who struggle to build trust;

*“Communities require more holistic services, and there needs to be community participation in the provision of services if we actually want to help people become well...”*

Holistic support is important when we recognise the huge diversity in refugee communities in Wellington and New Zealand. People come from a wide range of cultures, religions, experiences, rural or urban settings and so forth. Therefore the design and provision of support services needs to taken this diversity into consideration. Parenting support should be targeted at the appropriate group in communities;

*“Another thing we deal with is the continuum of strictness in terms of religion and culture, whole ethic around supporting people here at different stages, I think the stricter parents need the most support”*

#### Building informal support networks

The lack of adequate informal support networks was seen to be an issue for refugee parents. Families are separated by the refugee journey, and often women do not have their mothers, sisters, aunties, or tribe members around to help with the raising of children. Often women are isolated and alone, and coping with the demands of a family on top of all the other resettlement stressors. Therefore building solid relationships with other people in your community, whether it be ethnic, tribal, or geographic is seen as a high priority.

Strong communities offer a space to build relationships, to share experiences, and to discuss parenting issues and successes, these all have flow on effects for producing happy healthy children and families;

*“sound communities provide a good basis for families and for children to learn in, because adults are happy in their role and supported in their role, people*

*want to be with their children, they want to be with other peoples children...they don't need to be told, they naturally treat children with respect if they are happy in themselves and happy in there role."*

And;

*"Societies and communities have changed – people are isolated – women talking solves all the little problems so they don't grow up to be big problems. We need to get more of those community networks."*

Effective ways of supporting parents were seen to be by developing these informal support networks, all of the participants who had heard of the Arlington and Rintoul St Playgroups discussed how beneficial these groups were for the parents involved. These supported playgroups were suggested to be the best model that they had seen to effectively support isolated mothers;

*"It's crucial to keep them with families or people they relate too, and being close to other families. Things like the playgroup at Arlington, the idea of a more supported playgroup model is great"*

The Arlington and Rintoul St playgroups differ from standard playgroups because they are more supported than traditional Pakeha playgroups. The Arlington group was established at the beginning of 2005 by Ministry of Education and Plunket with the support of the Wellington City Council, in the Arlington Flats in central Wellington. The ethnic diversity at Arlington is high, and the Playgroup model was altered to recognise that many families were living in a lower-socio economic situation, had a number of stressors in their lives, or may not be familiar with the concept of a playgroup. Initially a Plunket nurse and Ministry of Education co-ordinator attended the playgroup every week to support its development, and to provide child health services. Gradually this support has been reduced, as parents become more familiar and confident in taking on responsibilities. The success of the playgroup is that it has been an excellent forum from building relationships between women in the complex, and a place to model positive parenting practices, and discuss parenting challenges.

*“I saw people making the effort to make those connections, usually it takes people months, to start making connections, you know ‘having coffee’, people at Arlington made connections in the first month. ‘Let’s go for a walk’, certain people were making connections to do things outside of playgroup because they had found someone in a similar situation to themselves. I was incredibly surprised how quick these were made...I think they were ripe, they just needed a space where they could see that, they also knew they came from the same community – so they didn’t have to say I am going spear in my small flat – its perfectly obvious – its that sense of community that everyone comes from the same space, maybe you don’t have to do all that digging to know each other because you all live at Arlington”*

While many commented on the benefits of group based support, which gave parents the opportunity to learn of one another, build friendships and make ‘connections’, they also commented on the need to outreach support to complement this.

#### 5.1.4(ii) Outreach support

Outreach support is an effective, yet more time and cost intensive method of parenting support delivery. It involves visiting families in their homes and building one-to-one relationships to fully understand and assist parents with their specific support needs.

Outreach support was seen as appropriate within a group, or playgroup based situation. Often mothers won’t come along when they are stressed, and it is too much of a burden to get along to the group. If a relationship has already been established with the co-ordinator, then it is easier to often reach to those most in need, hardest to reach, and at the most crucial times;

Participant: *“The true high needs families are still struggling out there, they don’t make it every week...they have more challenges staying in the group because they are more susceptible to health issues, or stressors in their own and families lives, in other groups there are more buffers, they have mothers to*



*look after children, friends, they have more links, more support networks....Its more likely there'll be a hick up because they don't have somebody else to help out."*

Interviewer: *"How can we help these families with high needs access playgroups?"*

Participant: *"The main factor is having a key worker, because they can look at the roll and think 'I haven't seen her for a month'. It's a time factor, identify she not there, ring her up and say shall I come by and help get the boys down, finding out why she's not making it...but making it at an appropriate time so they don't back off, you need to be tuned into when its appropriate to ask the questions and how to support, it's a delicate narrow path... I see this as truly significant to the work you are attempting"*

Again judging and respecting boundaries and cultural activities and patterns is key to carrying out this type of support effectively.

Service provides remarked that taking the time to build appropriate relationship with refugee families was key to working with them successfully, and that this is an effective method of support. Working with refugee parents presents a unique set of challenges for those working with them, often new ideas are regarded with cultural fear, particularly with issues as important as parenting. Furthermore, for people with limited connections with the mainstream society and coming from persecution backgrounds mean that building these trusting relationships is crucial. Taking the time, and developing trust allows for workers to understand the stages the family is at, and then help them in their own time;

*"Time – everything is a long process – nothing is easy, every step brings another problem – it's a process and it's tiring for mums. Us working with families works because we are there for the long-haul, it's about there being a certain time for things, and you have to wait until they are ready"*

Comments were also made that education specific outreach programmes were effective in working with refugee parents. This was seen to be due to the outreach

nature of the programme and the personality of the staff, more specifically than the content of the programme;

*“PAFT works well with refugee women as it is a down on the floor, hands on approach.”*

#### 5.1.4(iii) Resourcing

Another factor seen to be important to providing appropriate support was the need for adequate Resourcing to provide this care. Many service providers firstly saw that the current services were under resourced to deal with the parenting and resettlement needs of refugee families, secondly there were many gaps where parenting support services were not provided at all, and thirdly that communities were not appropriately resourced to support their own.

A gap for refugee parents was seen to be the lack of cultural appropriate child care facilities, and a lack of community spaces. These were seen to be important for mothers in particular, so they could leave their children while they attended English language classes or work;

*“Community funding to set up appropriate community centres and day-care services”*

Not having culturally appropriate early childhood education centres where children can learn in their mother tongue, and their community’s values and practices was seen to be a disincentive for mothers. Funding and capacity building support needs to be made available so that community spaces and services can be developed.

In addition to providing extra funding for more services, participants observed that they required more funding to pay for interpreters to do the work they already undertake;

*“What we need is free and easy access to interpreters. We are a NGO we have not got the funds...”*

#### 5.1.4(iv) Information accessibility

Helping parents understand New Zealand society was also seen as a way to support families, and to allow people the opportunity to learn important information about the different society they and their children will be living in, and how to negotiate these differences. It was commented that while New Zealand initially is very good in supporting quota refugees when they first enter the country, there is very little ongoing support. Service providers acknowledged that this was a gap that would have an impact on parents and how they carried out the parenting role;

*“... there needs to be another programme [after Mangere] about what life in NZ is like, these are the problems and challenges you may face, these are the challenges you are going to have with your children so you are going to have to start thinking about them now, and start to understand...”*

#### 5.1.5 Summary

Findings from the interviews with service providers have shown that many refugee families are still struggling with the resettlement process. While service providers themselves require more culturally appropriate referral services, better funding of interpreters, and wish to work from a more community capacity building perspective. The main findings include;

- Work with refugee parents and families requires time, it is a long process in building trust, understanding, and beginning to help.
- There is a need for greater service provision to support refugee parents and families, this support needs to be long-term, holistic and culturally appropriate.
- Work needs to be done in an empowering manner that builds on the strengths of communities. More people from refugee backgrounds need to be trained and employed to provide parenting support for own communities.

- There is a lack of funding for interpreters, and a lack of culturally appropriate counsellors, social workers and health professionals
- Many families are still struggling with the resettlement process after many years, it is difficult to provide parenting education when there are many other immediate barriers to well-being
- Parents need support in accessing services, and understanding what is available to them.
- There is a need to focus on the issues between parents and adolescents

## 5.2 Data from interviews with Community Leaders and Representatives

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

The main former refugee community groups established in Wellington include groups from the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. Representatives from the following groups were consulted for this research; Iraqi, Assyrian, Ethiopian, Somali and Sudanese.

There is great diversity in the cultural groups represented in this study, and a limitation of these findings is that they do not provide a discussion of the specific parenting practices and support needs for each individual community. More action orientated research targeted with parents in each of the ethnic groups would be beneficial.

In this study a mixture of male and female community leaders or representatives were interviewed; all seven interviewees except one were parents. Community leaders and representatives were identified through RMS Refugee Resettlement contacts, as representatives from their own community organisations, and through membership to the Changemakers Refugee Forum.

The responses from the Assyrian community came from a focus group situation, where the community representative asked women from the Assyrian community the research questions in their monthly meeting.

Aside from this one variation, the interview structure was the same as with the service provider participants, and involved a mixture of Informal Conversational and Interview Guide approaches (Patton, 2002).

The findings will be presented under four main headings, these are:

- What makes a 'good' parent in your community? - Parenting roles and practices
- Accessing parenting support– How and from whom?
- Challenges refugee parents in your community?
- Creating an environment for supported parents

### **5.2.2 What makes a ‘good’ parent in your community? - Parenting roles and practices**

Responses to this section came from discussion about what it means to be a good parent within each ethnic community, and what values representatives thought it was important for their children to learn. Although there is great diversity in the cultures represented in the interviews there were some common themes that stood out across the cultural divide. These common themes are;

- Culture, Religion and Identity
- Family and Community Support
- Involvement and Commitment
- Gendered Roles

#### **5.2.2(i) Culture, Religion and Identity**

Every community representative interviewed commented that a good parent is somebody who knows their own culture, language and religion, and teaches their children these and to be proud of their background. Community representatives said the following;

*“A good parent is somebody who knows their culture and language, and teaches their children about who they are”*

*“Our children need to keep their own culture, it is really important for us, we all have a right to our own religion, and we need to respect others beliefs. No one religion is better than the other”*

*“Its about culture and religion, they have to know there identity, it’s the only thing that parents brought here, and they need to learn to be proud of it. This also means having a good relationship with the local culture”*

*“To learn our culture and to follow it, so kids grow up respecting their parents. Keeping our culture with help keep the relationship between the parents and*

*children...*”

Aside from retaining their own cultural identity it was seen to be very important for parents to teach their children to respect and understand other cultures. Cross-cultural understanding was viewed to be a crucial pathway for building positive relationships with the host community, and for supporting children who lived between the two cultures;

*“A person who has a good understanding of other cultures – for parents the best thing is to learn that they are not the only people here in terms of culture, language, religion – so that they are not alone – they need to make friends with people from other communities. They need to build relationships with other people because they and their children are part of the wider community.”*

Religious practices and values were seen to be very important for both Muslim and Christian groups. Community representatives tried to teach their children these values by taking children along to Church or the Mosque, by discussing religion and praying with children, and by generally giving their children as many opportunities to learn about, and take pride in their religion;

*“I take my kids to the Mosque every Sunday, to learn Muslim rules, to read and write Arabic and the Koran. Its very important we support them, so they don’t lose their culture and religion”*

*“Christian faith is very important, how to respect, and how to grow in the church. It is important to ‘keep alive a good Christian [faith]’”*

*“I always pray in front of my children and call them to pray with me. They also listen to Islamic songs and verse from the Koran”*

#### 5.2.2(ii) Family and community support

Another value that distinguished good parents was somebody who could turn to the community for support, or already had plenty of support from family or the

community in place. A strength of the various communities was that the appropriate and organic types of parenting support were available from within their own resources;

*“A good parent is one who can turn to the community for support. If there are problems the whole community assists. A good parent is open to community support and can take advice as given... We support each other, ‘put everything together’, share ideas, share advice...”*

And;

*“In Africa, in the Sudan, it is everyone who watches out for the children. In the villages everyone knows who the next neighbour is, people are watching out for the children especially at night so they get home before it is dark. The strength of the culture is that the child is for everybody... The wider circle is much stronger than the immediate family circle.”*

Traditionally parents from the communities interviewed would have had a lot of support from their family and/or tribe. The rationale behind why turning to the community or family for assistance was such an important value was seen to be because this support was no longer readily available, and people are often isolated. People of the same ethnicity or tribe do not always live in the same area, and local travelling distances in New Zealand are much greater, and transport is often difficult to negotiate. Furthermore families have been separated by war and migration, and there is nobody to perform traditional helping roles, such as looking after the mother for one month after the birth of her child. Without the support that parents are used to, they often become very isolated and struggle to cope alone with the challenges of child raising.

The Somali community leader explained that many Somali's in Wellington try to live in close proximity to other people from their tribe. He noted that the Somali's in Arlington are all from the same tribe, as are in Miramar, and there are two big tribes in Lower Hutt. People locate themselves in this manner to be close to other people



from their tribe because they understand one another better, and can provide the most appropriate support;

*“To be a good parent in my culture you need to have enough support, we have single mothers with 6 to 8 children. They need someone to talk with, and talk about how to deal with the children. This is why people try to live close to other people from their tribe, where they can get the support they need...there are very different ways of raising children between the North and South, totally different styles”*

One of the key reasons for living with people from your own tribe is to replicate the type of support they would have received at home. Being with people who understand you is important to all areas of wellbeing, particularly parenting.

#### 5.2.2(iii) Involvement and commitment

Another value of good parenting is to be ‘involved and committed’ to the upbringing of your children. Children are seen as a blessing, and for the good of all. It has been commented that refugee journey and individuals strength to start their lives again are in hope that their children will have safer, brighter futures.

*“A good parent in my community is one who has involvement and commitment. ‘Being there’ and care and respect are important. The mother plays a large part in the children’s lives. There are strong ties – some of the children are breastfed until 18 months. In the Sudan there are different tribes but there are common values regarding parenting. These include that the children are secure and provided for and have enough to eat.”*

For some communities this ‘involvement and commitment’ entails slightly different sets of responsibilities than parenting in a western context, such as primarily providing for security, material, and spiritual needs. A challenge that some communities have faced is that in New Zealand parents take greater responsibility for their children’s education, whereas in the places like the Sudan education is more solely the teachers’ job. This often creates confusion and difficulties in adapting to

the New Zealand system, as there is seen to be a breakdown in the relationship between children, parents and the education system/school.

This involvement also included parents having a loving relationship, *“if we love each other we will be happy, we will be take care of our kids...”* An important factor which influenced the happiness of the parental relationship and the environment children grew up in for this participant was the ability to access work, they commented that *“if we have jobs we can afford everything we need for our kids, if we can afford everything we will not argue, and it will be good for our kids”*.

#### 5.2.2(iv) Gendered roles

Pronounced gender roles are a factor when considering parenting support for refugee communities. Parenting remains a predominantly woman’s task in the communities interviewed. Interviewees commented that the nurturing, raising and day to day caring for the needs of children are taken care of by women;

*“...women do everything – teach them about life, feed and clothe them, help with homework. Men do nothing; the kings and the servants! In Iraq there is extended family who will help; mothers, aunts, sisters, for example the women will help the new mother so she can stay at home for 1 month after the baby is born. But there is little family in New Zealand – so some men will support wives, but not if there is another woman to do this work”*

And;

*“It is the mother’s job to take of the children, the father is out working all day, and he comes home tired. We have a proverb ‘the Mother is the school, from her we learn all things, if that school is well organised it will produce a very good nation’...but it would be better if the father co-operates more with the mother, to support them, mothers need more breaks”*

As discussed above there is a level of gender inequality in some communities in the parenting role, and it is a mother’s primary responsibility to ensure the well-being of

her children. Without the help of other female family members around this task can become a taxing one.

In contrast to this situation some representatives mentioned that women and men have separate parenting responsibilities, but they are both jointly accountable for the upbringing of the children. In these circumstances men are required to take care of the external needs of the family, by providing income to pay for food, housing, and education, and to guarantee the safety of the family. Participants observed the following;

*“A good parent is involved and committed. Mothers play a very big role as do fathers who are very concerned with security issues. The father is involved with the ‘core business’ as he is the sole provider. The mother is involved with the daily routines, feeding etc. Family is very important and it is hard to understand Western society where both parents work. If they are both working they are both leaders and do not have distinct roles. Family values seem to be lacking in NZ.”*

*“Ours is a male dominated culture, always the children are with the mother and she is responsible and the man goes out to get the money.”*

*“Because the father is often not home, the mother has a big responsibility for the children, supporting them and doing everything for them. The father has the role of looking after the house, and the children, looking at ‘what is going on’ and sorting out the problems. Parents discipline the children together; they will sit together and talk with them”*

Some male community leaders note that it is difficult to understand the Western system where both men and women work, and parents are seen to be at cross purposes because there is nobody at home to take care of the family and children.

### **5.2.3 How is parenting support usually accessed? Who provides this support?**

Community representatives were asked if someone in their community had a behavioural issue or difficulties with their children who they go to for support, in New Zealand and in their birth countries or countries of asylum.

The overwhelming response to these questions was to seek advice and support from members of their own community. There were three options that were suggested under this section, firstly to seek support from your own ethnic community, secondly to gain support from the host community (e.g. service providers), and thirdly, that parents had nowhere to go and were not accessing any support when it was required.

#### **5.2.3(i) Ethnic community support**

Obtaining help with child and family issues through ones own ethnic community was the main channel for accessing support in the Iraqi, Ethiopian, Somali, and Sudanese communities. For the Sudanese community this involves going to a respected community leader, they would then call a meeting with elders and leaders to discuss the issues;

*“If there is a clash within the family, the parents talk to the elders, and call a family meeting. They get their answers there and talk to the parents or grandparents, ‘ or anyone who walks with a stick’. If the elders say you are wrong, you just have to take it, that is their jurisdiction. It is very strong...Women are seen as vulnerable and will be talked to later by their aunties... If a child was hit and harmed, the aunties would disapprove, and there would be a meeting. The children could not sit and listen even if they knew that others were unhappy about the situation. If a child was hit in NZ the family need to learn the legal side now. People do not know the law and the consequences”*

*“If something happens you could go to the community leader like \*\*\*. The leader would call the community together and sit and talk with them. Would only go to someone in the NZ community if it was serious. We would go to Women’s support, or someone like that, Family support.”*

These statements highlight that the community is the first point of call for parents, and that the authority of the community must be respected. Again this underlines the need for culturally appropriate support, and the need to work within, and develop the community structures and people that are already providing guidance for their people.

Refugee communities’ affiliations and divisions are complex. In many instances they are not ‘natural’ communities, and people who would normally not meet or have relationships are thrown together by being resettled in the same area. Sometimes these divisions between people can be overcome, and communities can begin to learn to work together to support one another. Aiming to establish unity is a challenging goal, as people are still intimately connected with family and trials in their homelands. Yet this is a goal that a number of the community organisations in Wellington, such as the Al Rafedain Iraqi Society, the Wellington Somali Council, and the Sudanese Community of Wellington, the Afghani society and the Changemakers Refugee Forum aspire to.

The Somali community have come a long way in building cross-clan relationships under the umbrella of the Wellington Somali Council, and yet this unity is secondary to the importance of tribal relationships.

*“Children are a tribal responsibility... If there is a problem you go to the tribe or spiritual leader, or an elder. However because of warfare people have lost the appropriate people to go too. In New Zealand people go to the Somali community, they go to the tribal elder or the most respected person in their tribe...People who come to me are from my tribe or region, or people related to my mothers tribe. I understand who they are and where they are from, it is very important to understand the tribal relationship...when they need help – it’s*

*personal and needs to stay in the tribe. This is particularly so in an oral community like ours because there is no privacy”*

The clan based system highlights the complexity of the Somali community, and the need people have to obtain support from their own people. These tribal relationships can only be completely understood by somebody with insider knowledge of the community and culture.

#### 5.2.3(ii) Host community support

All community leaders and representatives interviewed, with the exception of the Assyrian community, commented that their own community was the first place parents would go to get the support they required. Some commented that support from the host community would only be sort in a critical situation, “...[we] would only go to someone in the NZ community if it was serious.” SF

Even if families do end up seeking support from the host community there is often the need for this support and assistance to be ‘brokered’ by a respected or knowledgeable person within their own community. One participant commented that while people frequently seek her support, she will then help them in getting the appropriate support in the wider community;

*“I would go and see a counsellor, others will come to me, and I will talk with them and help them to see the right people, for example we had a boy who was being badly treated at school, we talked with the teacher and the NUHS social worker...”*

When community representatives or leaders are approached by members of their community for assistance, they need to have a clear understanding of how New Zealand society works and where to take people for support if it is not an issue that can be dealt with internally. As noted earlier, many refugee parents have limited knowledge of New Zealand society and their rights and responsibilities under the law, they may not know who to approach with queries, or may not be empowered to do this.

This process can be time and energy intensive for community representatives who provide this type of assistance, and they need support in juggling the constraints of employment, community services and balancing the needs of their families here, and aboard.

While the interview data highlighted that the host community is not the first or most appropriate point of call, all community leaders commented on the need to build stronger relationships with service providers and the mainstream host community. They also observed that refugee parents have a right to know what services are available to them, to be able access culturally appropriate support, and to have access to new material about parenting so they can make up their own minds about how these practices fit within their own culture and parenting methods.

All that were interviewed felt that providing better parenting support was an extremely important issue that must be faced by both the refugee communities and the mainstream society which they are apart of;

*“It’s the area I am most passionate about, for my community it’s the hardest, and the most important. I would like to see one day that they have enough support to resettle well, we don’t want to see our children with CYFS or in trouble, the costs will be too high for all of us... We need to support communities now, so that parents and their children can integrate well and build successful lives.”*

#### 5.2.3(iii) No support is accessed

The Assyrian community differed from the other community groups interviewed. As the community representative and the more than fifty women with whom the discussions were held agreed that nobody in their community normally accessed parenting support. They did not go to community elders, representatives, or to the Priest as this was seen as inappropriate, should be dealt with by the immediate family, and because there was a fear of gossip and shame;

*“The women say they don’t go anywhere. Most of the time the mother and husband try to solve the issue. There is a need to keep it confidential, we don’t talk about our private life, and there is gossip in the community. You especially wouldn’t talk about a behavioural issue with your child.”*

The community representative thought they might go to somebody if they knew they were confidential, and could be trusted. This person or organisation needed to be from outside of their own community.

#### **5.2.4 What are the challenges for parents in your community?**

##### **5.2.4(i) Cultural conflict and resettlement issues**

Throughout the interviews with community representatives the theme of cultural conflict was reoccurring. This conflict happens as parents and children attempt to make sense of their new society and the new ways of living they are exposed to. For all interviewed this conflict is amplified by the priority of needing to ensure that their children retain their mother tongue and their pride in their culture and identity. Parenting styles and methods are seen as the key way of instilling these values, and many parents are seen to cling to the traditional methods of parenting. The question remains as to how you negotiate the areas of cultural conflict, and how do you empower parents to start discussing and thinking about the different socialisation experiences their children are encountering?

*“As youngsters, as they are being nurtured, children are told what to do, and what is right and wrong. This is not to say that they do not have choices but in NZ they have many more choices.”*

And;

*“...child problems in the West seem to be overwhelming. In Sudan what is considered to be abuse here would be discipline there. To think differently is not a quick shift. They learn their own culture ‘indoors’, and going out to a different culture is difficult.”*



## Unemployment

Another area of cultural conflict which affects the family unit is the altered gender roles due to unemployment, and the impact this has on family hierarchies. As commented in the previous section on gendered roles, men often tend to be the sole provider responsible for bringing in money and providing security. For refugees resettled New Zealand there is large scale unemployment. Our social welfare system means that mothers and their children are able to access financial support through their own entitlement. These changes place stress on the family system, and highlight how important wider resettlement and well-being factors are in create a space for supported, happy parents and children;

Interviewer: *“Is it a problem when a man is on a benefit in New Zealand?”*

Participant: *“It is a problem because back home the man is the backbone, the provider, with wars and people being devastated, men are strong and happy there.*

Interviewer: *“Here, if they are not working what is the image?”*

Participant: *“Man has a different role and it is hard to replace that former role, it will take time. It also takes time for the women to get used to the changing roles where men can do things in the home, like wash dishes. The wife is used to the man being the provider and wants him to go out and start to look for a job. Back home in Sudan it is not an excuse for a man to be sitting around with his hands and legs folded, and not working. If there is no job in the town the man must go straight to the country and start a project, such as gardening. It is nothing like that here. The man has to keep looking for jobs while on a benefit. The reputation of the man is ‘hurt’, the children are not happy, there are many bills. There are some lucky ones who have jobs and their families are fine. Otherwise, if there is no job, families are jeopardised and the wife can react, and families can grow apart. There are examples in the African community where families have come here and have now crashed apart. The position of the man, the position of the whole family is dependant on the job.”*

### 5.2.4(ii) Lack of extended family support

Perhaps the hugest challenge for refugee parents is the difficulties in family reunification and the lack of 'extended' family support this implies. Without people with familial responsibilities to support parents, parents have nowhere to turn, and often struggle alone;

*"I'm not sure they go anywhere [for support], we have one woman with four children, she is really stressed, and WINZ keeps pushing her husband to work full-time but she wants her husband home so he can help with the children. We are here without relatives, we are helpless and don't know where to turn for support. Everybody else in the community has their own families and their own problems..."*

This participant also commented that if people did have some family here they were often too distant a relative to call on, and these families were too overburdened with their own issues to be able to help.

#### 5.2.4(iii) Accessing information

As previously noted accessing information about New Zealand society and parenting is difficult, some problems included understanding CYFS, laws, general information, accessing parenting information, accessing information from early childhood centres and schools, and accessing cultural and religiously appropriate materials for children.

Comments included;

*"There is lots of discussion around the Western ways in the community. The community needs to know more about the laws around children."*

And,

*"There is a lack of understanding about CYFS, they think its there to take their children away. They need somebody to explain the process, the legal terms,*

*what the words mean, what does neglect mean, what's abuse, what's not. If they have this information then they can ask these questions"*

And;

*"Most parents won't want to admit that they aren't doing well...what is needed is education about New Zealand, and what this means for being a parent here"*

And;

*"There is a lack of access to cultural and religious information about child raising"*

#### 5.2.4(iv) Teenagers

As with the findings from the service providers the issues faced by parents with teenagers was a strong concern;

*"The hard things for parents: when their children are tempted into smoking and drinking, and yet they want them to make kiwi friends too. Sometimes they want them to be kiwis and sometimes not. Children are doing well at school, doing lots of sport, soccer, basketball and netball and are doing well...It is hard to settle in new communities, but the more you learn, the happier you are, need to get out and mix. 'you feel free and you feel happy'".*

And;

*"we need to focus on specific age groups, 0 to 5, 5 to 12, and 13 plus – it is crucially important that we focus on the teenagers"*

Providing communities with assistance to appropriately support both parents and their teenagers is high priority. Without immediate action to the divides between parents and their teens are widening. For many young people this means pulling away from their culture, families, and educational opportunities. Community

representatives comment that self-esteem, and educational and employment achievements are too low for their young. Many young refugees in New Zealand feel lost and not sure where they fit in New Zealand, or their parents, culture. Urgent attention is required to enhance the self-esteem, cultural identity and opportunities for these youth, and importantly to help them and their parents build understanding across the generations.

### **5.2.5 Creating an environment for supported parents**

Considering the values that make a good parent, common avenues people use to seek support, and the specific challenges that refugee parents face refugee community representatives thought that we could support parents via the following mechanisms;

- Consultation and Collaboration
- Supporting communities to support their own
- Parenting groups

All the opportunities discussed in this section have one common theme, and that is that the provision of support must occur in full partnership with communities.

#### **5.2.5(i) Consultation and collaboration**

Consultation with the various communities is something that communities thought service providers should actively seek. Firstly this would be useful to explain what services are available, and secondly it would create a way of working together to provide the appropriate support.

The Assyrian womans group commented that;

*“If an organisation existed that could provide this type of parenting support, then they could come to one of our meetings and explain what they do, then we could decide if we wanted to use them”*

This consultation and collaboration will allow for support to be targeted at those with the highest needs, and communities know who these groups are, and know the best ways of reaching them;

*“We need to focus more on those parents who need it most. Support needs to be targeted at those who need it most without families, tribes and with no support or experience”*

#### 5.2.5(ii) Supporting communities to support their own

By working in partnership we will be supporting parents to support their own;

*“to employ a refugee parenting education co-ordinator, and to provide the appropriate information on parenting, if the community is well-resourced to have a programme on the radio, to go to different families to explain and talk with them, then the community will decide how to reach these families and to collaborate with other agencies”*

For most communities interviewed in this study the community was the first call for support. The suggestion is that these community mechanisms need to be better funded, and able to access capacity building training and support so that they can work collectively to retain their children’s culture and identity, and to ensure that parents are linked with the community and supported.

A method for supporting communities was the development of community centres for ethnic communities, so people could *“get together and celebrate their culture, kids could play sport and be active”*. The lack of a safe and accessible space for ethnic communities to call their own and gather at their own will is a large challenge for refugee community organisations, and impacts their ability to effectively reach and provide support for their people.

#### 5.2.5(iii) Parenting or woman’s groups

A reoccurring theme from participants was the need to establish women's or parenting groups. A variety of options were suggested and ranged from ethnic specific women's groups, to multicultural parenting groups to clan specific playgroups.

A key reason for women to join together was the opportunity to share experience, learn new ways, and make friendship with other people from different cultural backgrounds;

*"The women from other cultures have different cultural practices, its good when they share children raising practices and what they have been through."*

Previous experiences with the multicultural playgroups at Rintoul and Arlington have been positive. After a period of time getting to know one another, and building relationship at playgroup these friendships have extended beyond the organised setting;

Interviewer: *"Will women go to one another for support?"*

Participant: *"That depends on the relationship between the women, in the Rintoul area some will go to my mother-in-law or wife. This started when we begun the playgroup [the Rintoul St Playgroup] because the parents are there looking and observing the children together. Then from beyond the playgroup it goes into the houses, people starting calling, the discussions start and they start to know one another."*

Currently the only thing reducing the learning opportunities for parents who attend the Rintoul St playgroup is the lack of a qualified parenting educator to attend the programme, build relationships with the women, and to discussion parenting ideas and concepts;

*"With the playgroup the only problem is they need someone to come and talk with them about parenting, not to give a presentation, to spend an hour with each woman, to talk about what the challenges are, and how to deal with things. They also need to brings materials and ideas about parenting, so that*

*parents can know about the Kiwi styles of parenting and make up their own minds about how it relates to their culture... I think this support needs to come from the host community, this playgroup is multicultural, for example if it's a Somali worker then the Assyrian women may have trouble. Its risky not to have someone from the host community to bring the local experiences to them... then the women can interpret for themselves."*

The Ethiopian community representative also noted that the women in his community are very keen to establish a woman's group at their local church. This would be a place for women to come and talk, share the troubles and experiences, and speak in their own language, and to have rest from their responsibilities and childcare roles.

*"The women in our community want to start a group at the church, so they can talk together, in their language and share their troubles"*

This is similar to the needs of the Assyrian women, who are keen to increase the frequency for their group meetings. If women are relaxed and happy, and have a chance to join together socially, this in turn reflects on the capacity to be content and feel supported in the parenting role.

*"At the moment we do activities for women once a month or every two months, they tell us they want activities just for women once a week, no children or husband. Like when we went to Masterston, they sing and dance, and say 'we feel fresh and free, like we are having our life'"*

Another common barrier for both these groups was seen to be the lack of culturally appropriate and affordable childcare.

### **5.2.6 Summary**

Interviews with Community Leaders and Representatives have shown:

- It is crucial that parents from refugee backgrounds are able to support their children to maintain their culture and identity
- Parents from refugee backgrounds access parenting support through community channels, use community representatives to help them access support, or do not get any assistance for bringing up children
- Many parents are unsure about NZ laws, values and practices – they need support to integrate positively by retaining their culture, and building sound relationships with people from other ethnicities
- Service providers need to work with communities, to help them identify their own needs, and help them to support themselves
- There are less social support networks available to refugee parents, as families are scattered due to war and the refugee journey
- Parenting practices and values may differ greatly from abroad and in NZ there is a need to focus on the issues between parents and adolescents
- Support and information needs to be delivered through community networks
- Any parenting support needs to be aware of the gender roles and expectations within communities

## **Section Six – Discussion**

The UNHCR assert that “the best way to help refugee children is to help their families, and one of the best ways to help families is to help the community.” (UNHCR, 1994:8). When we look at how to make positive parenting information, such as the SKIP material accessible to refugee communities we must consider the context within which families and communities are parenting.

This analysis will consider the interview findings and the literature to discuss considerations when establishing parenting support with refugee communities. Particular emphasis will be given to how resettlement services and mainstream social services need to approach work with refugee parents, and the operational implications of this approach. Finally the organic community mechanisms of



parenting support will be discussed in relationship to more formalised parenting support provision.

Nash and Trlin (2005) comment that “*New Zealand has a long history of migration and (re)settlement. The stresses and strains on the changing fabric of society, together with the contributions which new arrivals make to the community are constantly under review*”. Refugees come to New Zealand as part of New Zealand’s obligations under international law and through family reunification processes. By nature of the refugee journey, when they first arrive they are often dependent on the host communities services and ‘generosity’.

While refugees are grateful for their new home and new opportunities for a safe life for their children (NZIS, 2004), they are uncomfortable with the fact they are marginalised and disempowered from taking part in decision-making processes and provision of support services for their own communities (Bihi, 1999; Tasew, 2004).

This constant review and commentary is generating discussion on how these resettlement services should be delivered, and by whom. Research undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development into the needs of refugee and migrant communities’ looks to refocus the resettlement process to concentrate on community based and generated support services (Ryan, 2004). Ideally the “*emphasis will be on helping refugee and migrant communities to develop and deliver social services, where appropriate, for their own communities*” (Ryan, 2004:2).

The need for this reorientation in the delivery of resettlement services is strong. Colic-Preisker & Tilbury (2003) argue that the way the refugee experience and identity is constructed by researchers and service providers influences whether refugees will be active or passive in their resettlement style. They suggest that “*the structure of settlement and welfare services may produce a victim mentality, leaving members of refugee communities inert and unable to see themselves as agents of change.*” (Colic-Preisker & Tilbury, 2003: 78). By taking a community driven and capacity building approach the resettlement sector is looking to work with refugees to empower them to have a voice in issues that affect their well-being, and not marginalise this vulnerable group further.

Our findings for the provision of parenting support services and information highlighted the same trends. Both service providers and refugee community representatives felt that all parenting support needed to have more community ownership and participation. This does not mean there is not a place for the host community in resettlement delivery, their role however is to work in partnership with refugee communities, and build their capacity so that integration can be a process of mutual change. This partnership approach requires clear channels of communication, ethnic diversity in the workforce, and ongoing dialogue between partners. Research from the United States (BRYCS, 2005) highlights specific considerations when establishing refugee parenting support, see the following findings in Box 1;

The Families Commission (2005) review states that “*parent support and development programmes can be delivered in a number of different ways; there is no one approach that will work for all families*”. While there are different programme models that may be effective, like the BRYCS (2005) experience, there are certain considerations that reoccur when developing any of these programmes for refugee communities.

**Box 1:** In a study of 28 refugee parenting support programmes across the US the Bridging Refugee Youth and Children’s Services (BRYCS: 2005) found that effective parenting programs with refugees tend to share the following characteristics:

- **Parents are involved in all program phases**, including planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- **Respected community leaders are engaged at the beginning of the project** to ensure it meets the needs of the community and to provide legitimacy to the effort.
- **Potential barriers to attendance are addressed**, such as transportation, location, time of day, child care, culturally-appropriate food (parents may bring food to share).
- **Programs exhibit culturally competent practice that starts “where the client is.”** Staff get to know and appreciate the refugees’ own approach to parenting, address the parents’ “felt needs,” and work diligently to be aware of their own biases.

Lessons are linked to cultural beliefs and value:

- **Concrete and experiential methods are used** to teach about

Many refugee families in Aotearoa struggle on a daily basis to make ends meet, the stress of cultural adaptation, learning a new language, and trauma and loss experiences are compounded by a lack of appropriate housing, unemployment, and lack of access or information about appropriate services and entitlements. The poverty experiences of refugees in New Zealand place substantial burdens on the family unit (Guerin & Guerin., 2002). Findings from research reviewing parenting support suggest that if parenting support is to be effective it can not occur in isolation when parents are experiencing poverty (Attree, 2005; Families Commission, 2005; Gray, 2001). Working with refugees in a more holistic manner, and one that respects where parents are at, would appear to be most effective. Therefore support needs to be multifaceted, and long-term in duration. These findings were also reflected in the experiences of RAS Refugees as Survivors counselling and trauma services, who found that they often had to work through the immediate practical issues of resettlement before the therapeutic work could even begin (Chapman, 2002).

Taking into account the context of refugee families also requires parenting support to be aware of the gendered needs of families, and also the specific needs of more vulnerable gender groups, such as sole mothers. Targeted support that addresses their specific needs and barriers to accessing services is required.

Any support provided needs to respect the cultural, religious and language needs of refugee parents. Community representatives felt that the most important parental skill was to teach children to be proud of their culture, language and identity, indeed this was seen to be the most important value for children to learn. Bihi (1999) found that children's upbringing is an important site of cultural change and values. His research highlighted that the exposure to mainstream culture was seen as a constant threat to Somali culture, parents required the tools to cope with the mainstream culture in a positive manner. A key tool was feeling secure in their cultural identity, as *"refugees need to regain order and meaning and this cannot be offered by a social system based on values that are alien to them"* (Bihi, 1999: 104).

This highlights and reflects the finding in our research, that most community representatives believed that people in their community continued to seek support and advice through the traditional structures in their culture, such as tribal elders, or respected leaders in their community. If we are to provide effective parenting support and sustain positive cultural identities we must work within, or support the social system and values of our newest communities. As the community representatives suggest, these support systems and relationships are complex. Thus partnership is the only appropriate method that can facilitate mutual understanding of refugee community and host community structures.

Many community representatives are still learning about the social systems in Aotearoa and how to negotiate these for the benefits of their communities. Likewise refugee parents require information about support services in their own language, via either written or oral communication. Negotiating these systems requires the support of the host community. Being effective in cross-cultural communication was an area that many service providers were still struggling with, particular due to a lack of funding for interpreters, a lack of cultural diversity in the workforce, being overburdened with case loads, and not having the time or outreach capacity to work with families in a long-term manner.

In an evaluation of a parenting training programme for parents for the Horn of Africa region Sheriff (1995) found that communication, and outreach work were important in developing services for refugee children and their families. She comments that;

*“Refugee parents know little about the services that are on offer, they are often deeply suspicious of official figures and frequently reluctant to approach organisations which may turn out to be unsympathetic. Out reach work using community workers and advocates to approach refugee women direct is particularly important if women are to be encouraged to seek services which assist them and their children.”* (Sheriff, 1995: 30).

Another theme that arose in our scoping study was the need to address the issues being faced by refugee parents and their teens. Although this study has focused on the 0 to 5 age group, both service providers and community representatives were eager to talk about parenting teens, this reflects findings in the US which state that;

*“Even if your programme focuses on families with very young children, it is important to help parents prepare for the special cultural issues that arise as refugee and immigrant children reach adolescence. If possible offer a continuum of parent support services so that refugees can prepare for new challenges as their children grow”* (BRYCS, 2005: 2)

These concerns have also been raised by young refugees in Wellington in two recent participatory youth projects with Assyrian and African youth (Evolve, 2005; VUW, 2005). Young people thought that issue associated with parent/child relationships and intergenerational tension was one of their strongest concerns. A number of actions for improving these relationships were recommended; this involved running workshops for youth and their parents, and holding ‘celebrate your parents’ events (Evolve, 2005).

As a service provider suggested, parenting education *‘...has to start from an early age to be really effective – if parents are learning these skills now it’s going to make so much difference later on.’* Thus, there is utility in providing parenting support and information to parents with children of all ages, but we also need to consider where families are experiencing the most immediate concerns, and that appears to be with adolescents.

A further consideration for working with refugee parents includes building informal support networks. Like the experiences of refugees abroad, refugee parents in Wellington are often isolated, and experience fear and insecurity (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005). Developing a sense of community, belonging and connection with other parents is important.

Service provider's role in developing informal support networks means we need to assess how to work alongside the organic community mechanisms of parenting support. Colic-Preisker & Tilbury (2003: 69) found that *"...participants from the Horn of Africa tended to be 'active achievers' in resettlement were also highly involved in their communities. They felt that problems could be resolved through strong community ties and traditional bonds."*

Many refugee parents would normally have family and tribal members living close by in their country of origin or asylum. These people are there to assist with raising children, and supporting the needs of the family. To counter isolation initiatives that help build geographical, ethnic, or shared interest community relationships seem to be a good way to approach parenting support. Both the Rintoul and Arlington playgroups have proven to be effective in building a shared sense of community in geographical areas, with people of similar circumstances.

Communicating parenting information to these playgroups occurs naturally as parents learn through watching and talking with other parents (Read, 2005). The next step to enhancing the functioning of playgroups would be the regular attendance of a parenting support educator, to build trusting relationships with parents, and to discuss new ideas and methods of parenting and child development.

Predominantly service providers and community representatives thought this would be best provided by trained community members. By taking a capacity building approach to train and employ refugees as parenting support workers to provide bi-lingual and cross-cultural support through a number of parenting support methods.

However the Assyrian and Somali community representatives thought that this support needed to be provided by members of the host community. It is clear that a

number of different levels of support are required, by people of mixed ethnicity. This reflects findings from research with ethnic minority and African families in London which found that shared ethnicity and language was important for some families using services, while others found that having a support worker from their own community was intrusive, and was not confidential (Gray, 2002 & Brandon *et al*, 1999 respectively, cited in Chand & Thoburn, 2005). This again highlights the need for partnership and an ethnically diverse and culturally sensitive workforce.

For refugee parents both the provision of services that builds refugee communities capacity to carry out their own cultural and support services, and more formalised parenting support services are seen to be necessary. A meta-synthesis of qualitative evidence about parenting support in the context of poverty concluded that *“formal support services have the potential to fill gaps in informal support systems for poor families, but only if these are provided in ways which are sensitive to their needs.”* (Attree, 2005: 330)

Any parenting support needs to start where with needs of the parents and community. This support should be culturally and operationally flexible, and responsive. In Wellington both formalised and informal parenting support is required to better support our newest parents and communities.

## Section Seven - Recommendations

Refugee parents come to New Zealand with many strengths, rich cultural diversity, and a resilience and the desire to build better futures for their children. Many refugees are already good parents in spite of the trauma, loss and change that often characterises these periods of their lives. What support they do need is how to learn to parent in a completely different social and cultural context, and to develop a sense of community with strong support networks.

This study has drawn on a wealth of knowledge from the literature, project evaluations, from interviews with experience service providers, and most importantly with refugee community leader and representatives themselves. These recommendations highlight the considerations and best practice for responding to refugee parents needs, and finally identifies immediate, medium and long-term areas for action to more appropriately support refugee parents.

This study suggests two methods for establishing sustainable parenting support for refugee communities in Wellington:

1. Supporting refugee communities to run their own parenting support activities, and
2. (a) Working collaboratively with refugee communities to establish a service that meets the needs of refugee parents, or (b) Existing parenting support organisations working collaboratively with refugee communities to alter their service to make it accessible to refugee parents

The first option entails a service wholly owned by the community, while the second option, both (a) and (b) entail a service jointly delivered and owned by service providers and communities.



## 7.1 Best practice recommendations

When looking to establish parenting support in refugee communities, all initiatives and activities need to consider the following:

- 1) Working in partnership with refugee communities, so they have ownership of decision-making processes, identification of needs and methods of action, and are employed within the organisation.
- 2) Take a holistic approach to service provision, it is essential that the resettlement needs of families are fully understood and addressed. This means considering and addressing housing, employment, childcare and transport needs of parents.
- 3) Developing a Communication Strategy – this involves identify key community representatives and members, other refugee resettlement support services, both written and oral information in service users mother tongue, and multiple methods of communicating and building trusting relationships.
- 4) Build on informal support networks, initiatives should not just focus on providing information to refugee parents, but assist them to pull a sense of community, and build friendships and support networks.
- 5) Programme content and delivery need to be linked to the cultural beliefs and values of communities.
- 6) Employ and train staff for cultural and linguistic diversity, ideally employing people from refugee backgrounds.
- 7) Take a multi-levelled approach to the provision of support, this includes both outreach and group or centre based activities

- 8) Strong administration, and participatory monitoring and evaluation to support the responsiveness and sustainability of the programme/s.
- 9) Ensure that services targeting the parenting of adolescents are also provided.

## 7.2 Opportunities for action

Supporting refugee parents means taking a holistic focus at enhancing the environment that parents and children inhabit, this means supporting community organisations to establish and achieve their goals, supporting cultural activities, and helping families with the practical tasks of resettlement.

**These opportunities for action have come from the initial consultation, interviews with participants, and from sequential discussions with community representatives and service providers, and suggest work at multiple levels and through various methods.**

### 7.2.1 Immediate opportunities for action

Action	Aim	Key Partners	Timeframe
<b>1. Establishing a Somali Playgroup in Miramar</b>	To provide a Supported Playgroup to the Miramar Somali community modelled on the Rintoul St and Arlington experience, but targeted at a specific ethnic and clan based group. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Continue consultation with the Miramar Somali community</li><li>- Hold meeting between all key parties</li><li>- Confirm venue and time</li><li>- Host a model playgroup for Somali women in Miramar at the beginning of March 2006</li><li>- Trial playgroup for 2 months</li><li>- Develop ideas with women for discussing parenting practices</li></ul>	Wellington Somali Council Miramar Somali Sports and - Cultural Trust Plunket Ministry of Education Playgroup Co-ordinator SKIP local initiatives (?)	February to May 2006 trial period
<b>2. Support the establishment of a multi-</b>	Expand the successful Arlington Supported Playgroup model to another WCC housing area.	WCC Social Housing Plunket	Beginning 2006

<b>cultural playgroup at the WCC Central Park flats</b>		Ministry of Education Playgroup Co-ordinator Tenants SKIP local initiatives (?)	
<b>3. Provide SKIP training workshops for parents from various refugee communities in Wellington</b>	To build the capacity and parenting knowledge for refugee community leaders in Wellington who traditionally provide informal parenting support and advice to their community. To raise the awareness of the SKIP programme, principles and windows of opportunity.	Changemakers Refugee Forum SKIP Train the Trainers	April/May 2006
<b>4. Developing a childcare scheme to employ young woman from refugee communities as babysitters</b>	Work with communities to support them in providing cultural appropriate childcare by up skilling and employing their young women as babysitters. Members of the Assyrian and Somali communities have expressed an interest in this project.	RMS Community Development Team Assyrian Women's Group Wellington Somali Council – Youth Representatives	No set timeframe
<b>5. To support the Ethiopian (Amharic) community to establish a woman's group at their local church</b>	To support the needs of women from the Ethiopian community.	Ethiopian (Amharic) Community Berhampore Anglican Church RMS Community Development Team	No set timeframe
<b>6. To support the activities of the Assyrian Woman's Group</b>	Woman wish to meet once a week to have rest from parenting, and enjoy one another's culture and company. Support needs to come in the form of capacity building training, and assistance with finding funding to help deliver their initiatives	Assyrian Women's Group Changemakers Refugee Forum RMS Community Development Team	From February 2006
<b>7. Hold a SKIP information session, or fun day trip with the</b>	Insure that the Assyrian Women's Group fully understands and is able to access the SKIP local initiatives fund if they are interested in having further	Assyrian Women's Group RMS Community Development Team	No set timeframe

<b>Assyrian Woman's Group</b>	discussions about parenting		
<b>8. To consult further with Women from the Upper Hutt Sudanese community</b>	To consult further with women in the Sudanese community at the Stitch 'n' Chat group about the SKIP messages, and how they relate to their culture, and how or if they may be useful to them as parents.	Sudanese Community of Wellington RMS Community Development Team	No set timeframe
<b>9. To discuss parenting needs with community members of the Al Rafedain Iraqi Society</b>	To assist the Al Rafedain Iraqi Society carry out their action goals for women and children in 2006/07	Al Rafedain Iraqi Society RMS Community Development Team	2006/2007
<b>10. To provide parenting support programmes for teenagers and their parents</b>	To build the relationships and understanding between refugees parents and their teens. To build the intergenerational and intercultural understandings of parents and their children.	Evolve Youth Service Other Pacific or Migrant communities with experience in these areas. Government	Urgent
<b>11. Continue pursuing funding for the establishment of a Travellers Pilot programme to support young people from refugee backgrounds cope with change and loss.</b>	Travellers programme works on the metaphor 'that life is a journey', and aims to help young people cope with loss and change, and to feel more connect with people and support networks. The programme will employ and train refugee youth leaders to be facilitators of the Travellers programme, and pilot one group for girls, and one group for boys.	Changemakers Refugee Forum Wellington Somali Council Inc Skylight	June 2005 to December 2006
<b>12. Build direct links between refugee communities and CYFS and CAFS</b>	Enhancing the relationship between these communities and statutory social work agencies will allow an open channel of communication to enhance understanding and relationships on both sides.	Changemakers Refugee Forum Wellington Somali Council CYFS and CAFS	End 2006

### 7.2.2 Medium and long-term opportunities for action

Action	Aim	Key Partners
<b>1. More action focused research with refugee parents and specific communities.</b>	There is need for greater research with families from ethnic minority communities in Wellington. However there is considerable consultation fatigue in Wellington's refugee communities, and a lack to specific services or funding to meet previously identified needs. It is suggested that running strong participatory programme evaluations, Participatory Action Research (PAR) alongside projects would be the most effective and meaningful research for refugee parents and communities in Wellington.	Refugee Community Organisations, leaders, and families, parents and children Evolve Youth Health Centre Assyrian Youth Association Changemakers Refugee Forum Families Commission Service Providers Universities and Early Childhood Education Specialists Government
<b>2. Training and employment of parenting co-ordinators from refugee backgrounds to provide outreach support and parenting groups, and supported playgroups in their own communities.</b>	There is a strong need for parenting services to reflect the ethnic diversity of our population, and our high needs communities. At present there are no organisations that immediately stand out as possible partners for action. However the PAFT programme has received some good feedback and the Family Start initiative could be beneficial if this programme was tendered in Wellington.	RMS Refugee Resettlement Changemakers Refugee Forum
<b>3. Develop culturally and linguistically appropriate SKIP parenting resources</b>	Refugee parents are often unable to access information and resources in their own language or that are culturally appropriate.	SKIP Skylight Trust Individual refugee community organisations

	Creativity is required in the development of such resources, as many refugee mothers are illiterate or preliterate in their mother tongue. Resources such as wordless books, posters and videos may be most accessible.	Link in with other refugee communities or activities nationally. There is a wealth of multilingual public health and parenting resources available internationally
<b>4. Training and employment of more culturally diverse social workers, counsellors, nurses and other health professionals in all statutory, health and NGO organisations that support ethnically diversity cliental.</b>	Providing culturally competent and linguistically appropriate staff is seen as the best method from supporting diverse communities.	Government Changemakers Refugee Forum – Advocacy MSD NGO Social Worker Study Awards CCDHB, HVDHB
<b>5. More action needs to be taken in the Wellington region to enhance the employment outcomes and opportunities for refugee parents and communities</b>	Refugee community leaders and literature highlight the importance of taking a holistic approach to parenting support. Working with refugee parents so to enhance their employment opportunities is a key action that will improve resettlement	See the Regional Refugee Health and Well-being Action Plan (2006) for inter-sectoral plans for Employment and Economic Well-being.
<b>6. Access, review, and possibly purchase international materials on parenting education for the specific communities and cultural groups interviewed in this study</b>	All parents have a right to access information about parenting that is culturally and religiously appropriate. There is a wealth of information available internationally, and utilising these resources means	Changemakers Refugee Forum
<b>7. There is a lack of co-ordinated government policy for refugee resettlement</b>	At present the funding of resettlement services is ad hoc and not governed by any clear guiding policy. There needs to be central leadership in this area.	Refugee Communities Government NGO's/Service Providers

### 7.3 Summary

Unfortunately the SKIP programme does not provide for core service delivery of parenting initiatives, instead aims to support communities distribute parenting material and information to parents in the best way they see fit. This scoping study suggests that for our newest Kiwi parents there is a strong need to first assist communities' with establishing sustainable parenting groups or networks. Then help them access parenting information and materials, so they can discuss how these concepts relate to their culture and needs.

At present, many refugee parents are isolated and unsure of their rights and responsibilities as parents, and require new ideas for parenting in the Kiwi context. There are no groups for refugees targeted specifically at parenting in the Wellington region at present. There are however woman's groups, in the Assyrian and Sudanese communities, and the Rintoul St Playgroup, which would provide good venues for discussing parenting practices.

This scoping study suggests that there are many different mechanisms available for making parenting information available to Wellington's former refugee communities. These require multileveled and multifaceted support from the communities themselves, service providers and government.

There is no one model for parenting, or parenting support, and it is parents overarching right to raise their children within their own cultural values. In the Wellington region there are many opportunities to support the rights of refugee parents to access parenting information. If communities, service providers and government are able to work together in partnership to focus on developing support systems for refugee parents, there are many projects waiting to be realised. The present dearth in parenting support activities for refugee parents needs to change, so parents can get the support they need to bring up happy, healthy and secure children and families.



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## **Section Nine - Appendices**

### **Appendix One – Steering Group Terms of Reference**

#### **RMS/SKIP STEERING GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE**

##### **Background**

The Wellington office of RMS Refugee Resettlement (formerly Refugee and Migrant Services) has received funding to conduct a study into how the ‘Strategies for Kids: Information for Parents’ (SKIP) Local Initiative can be best implemented with local refugee communities.

The purpose of SKIP is to support parents to have healthy and loving relationships with their children. It is aimed at parents and caregivers of children from birth to five years of age and focuses on ‘positive parenting’.

We at RMS feel that the SKIP message is important and is one that we want it to be communicated to refugee communities. We also believe that, if SKIP is to be effective, an understanding of parenting issues facing local refugee communities is needed.

##### **Aims**

The aims of the study are to:

- Identify specific parenting needs for refugees in the Wellington region.
- Identify particular considerations in responding to those needs.
- Identify best practice in responding to those needs.

The study is seen as a precursor to a further SKIP Local Initiative Fund Application that will focus on implementation activities.

The refugee communities that will be included in the study are Ethiopian, Eritrean, Oromo, Somali, Sudanese, Iraqi and Assyrian Iraqi. The ultimate aim of the study is to improve the ability of those communities to raise children using effective non-physical discipline.

##### **Role of the Steering Group**

The primary role of the Steering Group is to provide those directly involved in the project with guidance and support. Specifically, in the areas of;

- Refugee experiences
- Cultural issues

- Research methodologies
- Best practice.

It is expected that Steering Group members will have an understanding of and a commitment to the underlying principles and aims of the SKIP Initiative.

Due to the nature of the project the Steering Group is not expected to take responsibility for budgetary strategy or oversight.

At the end of the study the Steering Group will be expected to provide a Report to show the adherence of project activities with standards of best practice (as understood by the Group).

## **Structures**

Prior to meeting, the Steering Group will be provided with all relevant information on

- The SKIP Initiative
- RMS Refugee Resettlement
- The RMS/SKIP Scoping Study

It is expected that the Study will take approximately seven months to complete (from February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005) and the Steering Group will meet four times over that period.

The Group will comprise of five members with one member being elected Facilitator, or with rotating facilitation.

The Steering Group is responsible for determining it's own meeting protocols and understandings.

Group members will be given a koha of \$50.00 per meeting. Travel and parking costs will be reimbursed if appropriate.

## **Contacts**

Kathryn Ng at RMS Refugee Resettlement on (04) 384-6295 or [kathryn.ng@rms.org.nz](mailto:kathryn.ng@rms.org.nz)  
 Rachel Ward on (04) 384-6295 or (027) 427-6935 or [rms\\_wgtn@rms.org.nz](mailto:rms_wgtn@rms.org.nz)

## Appendix Two - Project Information Sheet



### Information Sheet

Researcher: **Rachel Ward** - Research Coordinator

Contact Details: RMS Refugee Resettlement – Wellington Office  
Multicultural Service Centre  
Level One  
61-63 Taranaki St  
Wellington.

Tel: 04 3856295  
Email: [rms\\_wgtn@rms.org.nz](mailto:rms_wgtn@rms.org.nz)

Supervisors: **Kathryn Ng**  
RMS Refugee Resettlement – Regional Manager  
Multicultural Service Centre  
Level One  
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**Mary Nash**  
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This research is being undertaken for RMS Refugee Resettlement (Wellington Office) and the Ministry of Social Development. The scoping study aims to identify methods of providing accessible parenting support and education for Wellington's most recently arrived refugee communities, with children in the 0 to 5 age range. The research is also being undertaken to fulfil the requirements for the completion of a Masters of Social Work (Applied) Degree research project at Massey University, New Zealand.

I am employed part-time by RMS Refugee Resettlement to complete this project, and I am also employed part-time by the Wellington Somali Council as a Community Development Coordinator. I have been involved in working with Wellington's former refugee communities on a voluntary and paid basis for the last 18 months. I am also a part-time extramural student at Massey University, New Zealand.

This scoping study looks to engage with service providers, community leaders and communities about:

- What are the specific needs and strengths of parents from refugee backgrounds in the Wellington region
- How can we best respond to these needs, and support the strengths of parents from these communities
- What types of programmes and interventions would be culturally appropriate and sustainable for the various communities.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to meet with Rachel Ward for **one** interview, which will take between 1 to 1 ½ hours. This interview will take place at a time and location that is convenient to you, preferably your offices, or the RMS Refugee Resettlement offices at 61-63 Taranaki St.. The interview will occur in private, unless you request to have another person present, or there are two people interested in participating in the study from your office/community. The interview will be tape record, unless you request otherwise.

The interview will ask you questions about your (or your organisations) involvement with parents from refugee backgrounds, about the challenges and strengths of these parents, and about ways to more effectively support parents with children in the 0 to 5 age range who are from refugee backgrounds.

If you take part in the study you have the right to:

- withdraw from participating in the project at any time up until the end of July 2005
- decline to answer any line of questioning or any particular question
- direct that the tape recorder be turned off at any time during the interview
- have all questions answered about the research to your satisfaction
- specify whether or not the name of your organisation will be used in the study
- be guaranteed that your name will not be used
- have access to a full report when the study is complete

If you have any further questions about the research please feel free to contact me, Rachel Ward, either via telephone or email. If you have any concerns about the research please contact Kathryn Ng, or Mary Nash, both of whose details are listed at the beginning of the information sheet.



“SKIP is about supporting parents to have loving and healthy relationships with their children.”

SKIP stands for Strategies with Kids/Information for Parents. It is a government initiative to provide positive parenting information for parents and caregivers of children aged 0 to 5 years. This means supporting communities and community organisations to provide information and education in ways which best meet the parenting needs and values of their own communities.

With SKIP’s assistance RMS Wellington is looking into the needs of our refugee parents, and how parenting support could be provided to best meet the diverse cultures and needs of refugee parents in the Wellington region.

What exactly is the SKIP message?

To provide parents and caregivers positive parenting information that uses effective, non-physical discipline to set boundaries and limits to teach children right from wrong. Methods of effective discipline include:

- Parental warmth and involvement
- Clear communication and expectations
- Reasoning and explanation
- Rules, boundaries and demands
- Consistency and consequences
- Structuring situations.

SKIP recognises that there is no one model for parenting, and that parents overarching right is to raise their child within their own cultural values. Therefore SKIP is responsive to and respectful of the ethnic and cultural diversity of parents and their children.

**RMS Wellington aims to provide a scoping study which will:**

- Identify specific parenting needs for refugee communities in the Wellington region
- Engage with these communities, and relevant community organisations, to discuss how these parenting needs can best be met
- Identify possible community endorsed methods to provide positive parenting education and support



Strategies with Kids | Information for Parents

If you would like any further information please contact Rachel Ward on 3846295 or 0274276935

## Appendix Three – Participant Consent Forms



### Participant Consent Form

**This consent form will be held for a period of two (2) years**

I have read the information sheet, and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the research have been answered to my satisfaction, and I am aware that may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped

I wish/do not wish to have the tapes returned to me

I agree/do not agree to have the name of my organisation used in this study

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet

Participants have the right to:

- withdraw from participating in the project at any time up until the end of July 2005
- decline to answer any line of questioning or any particular question
- direct that the tape recorder be turned off at any time during the interview
- have all questions answered about the research to their satisfaction
- be guaranteed that their name will not be used
- specify whether or not the name of your organisation will be used in the study
- have access to a full report when the study is complete

If you have any concerns about the research please contact Kathryn Ng, or Mary Nash, both of whose details are listed on the information sheet.

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Full** ..... **Name** ..... **(printed):** .....

## Appendix Four – Staff Confidentiality Form



**RMS**  
Refugee Resettlement

### Staff Confidentiality Agreement

All information and data collected in the RMS Refugee Resettlement research project titled *Providing parenting support for Wellington's former refugee communities* will be held confidentially at RMS Refugee Resettlement, Wellington Regional Office, Level 1, 61 – 63 Taranaki St, Wellington. The information will be locked and secure, and the only people who may have access to the information include the staff of RMS Refugee Resettlement Wellington Office.

The staff hereby agree to respect the confidentiality and privacy of participants, and of any information they may become party to over the course of their work.

Name.....Signature.....Date.....

Name.....Signature.....Date.....

Name.....Signature.....Date.....

Name.....Signature.....Date.....

Name.....Signature.....Date.....

Name.....Signature.....Date.....

Name.....Signature.....Date.....

Name.....Signature.....Date.....

Name.....Signature.....Date.....

## Appendix Five – Service Provider Interview Questions



### Interview Questions for Service Providers

The following is a list of questions you will probably be asked during the interview. The interview will be semi-structured and informal, so these questions are just to give you an idea of the type of issues that will be addressed. It may help to discuss these questions with other people in your organisation, so we can gather as many perspectives as possible. Please feel free to call me, or one of the supervisors, if you are unsure of about any of these questions, or would like any more information about the research itself.

1. How is your organization involved in the provision of support services for refugees, or parents from refugee or ethnic minority backgrounds?
2. What are the challenges for your organisation in working alongside former refugee families and communities?
3. What are the key values that underpin successful work with former refugees, or parents from refugee backgrounds?
4. How do you believe the provision of services for former refugees, or parents from refugee backgrounds can be improved?
5. How can we work together to make these improvements?
6. What sort of support would your organisation like to receive to help you work more effectively with people from refugee backgrounds?
7. What do you think are the key components for successful parenting support to parents with children in the 0 to 5 age range?
8. How can we think creatively to provide better parenting support?



## Appendix Six – Community Leader Interview Questions



### Interview questions for Community Leaders

Here is a list of questions that you will probably be asked in the interview. These questions are prompts, or can be thought of as questions to focus our conversations, but the interview will not necessarily follow this format. It may help to think about these questions, and how they relate to your community prior to the interview. Please feel free to call me, or one of the supervisors, if you are unsure of about any of these questions, or would like any more information about the research itself.

1. What makes a 'good' parent in your community?
2. What are the most important values for children to learn?
3. What are the strengths of parents in your community/culture?
4. What are the different parenting roles and responsibilities for men and women in your culture/community?
5. Is religion or are spiritual values an important factor in how children are brought up in your community? What impact does this have parenting practices?
6. If you had a behavioral problem/issue with your small child, who would you go to for support?
7. How is parenting support usually provided in your family, community, culture? Who provides this support?
8. What are the challenges for parents in your community?
9. How can your community overcome these challenges/barriers?
10. How can service providers assist/ or work with your community to overcome these challenges?